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THE JEFF MINTER STORY

DIGITAL ECLIPSE ON
CRAFTING ITS LATEST
TREASURE TROVE



**RETROTINK 4K
REVIEWED!**

THE EVOLUTION OF

CRASH BANDICOOT



ULTIMATE GUIDE:

ICO

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10 ESSENTIAL GAMES YOU NEED IN YOUR COLLECTION

**HOW NAUGHTY DOG'S
MISCHIEVOUS MARSUPIAL
BECAME A PLATFORMING ICON**

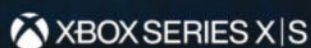
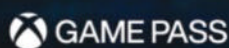


ALSO INSIDE

KUNG-FU MASTER RICHARD BROWNE
HARMFUL PARK YES, **PRIME MINISTER**
SKIES OF ARCADIA DEADLY CREATURES
DOUBLE DRAGON II: THE REVENGE **SOULSTAR**

STILL WAKES THE DEEP

COMING 2024
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE CRASH BANDICOOT GAME?



DARRAN JONES

I'm going with *Crash Bandicoot: Warped*. There's lots of variety and it builds significantly on Crash's first two adventures.

Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!

Currently playing:

Ori And The Blind Forest

Favourite game of all time:
OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast



TIM EMPEY

The first *Crash Bandicoot* game. Actually, I think I only played the demo from some cover disc. God, I'm cheap.

Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go

Currently playing:

Yakuza 5

Favourite game of all time:
God Hand



NICK THORPE

I'll always have the softest spot for *Crash Bandicoot 2*, since it was one of the games that I received along with my PlayStation in 1998.

Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III

Currently playing:

Super Magnetic Neo

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



ANDY SALTER

Never played one.

Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!

Currently modding:

Total War: Rome Remastered

- *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*

Favourite game of all time:

Rome: Total War although I guess it's the Remastered edition now



RORY MILNE

Naughty Dog really outdid itself with *Crash Bandicoot: Warped*.

The variety of challenges it delivers is amazing, and for a PS1 title its visuals are absolutely stunning.

Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing

Currently playing:

Tempest 3000

Favourite game of all time:
Tempest



PAUL ROSE

You can't beat the first *Crash!*

Expertise: Winging it

Currently playing:

Horizon Forbidden West

Favourite game of all time:
Half-Life 2



DAVID CROOKES

I really enjoyed *Crash Bash* when it was released in 2000. Its many minigames became a bit of a party favourite.

Expertise: Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, *Dizzy* and PlayStation 2 (but is it actually retro? Debate!)

Currently playing:

Hotel Dusk: Room 215

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



ANDREW FISHER

Wrath Of Cortex on GameCube is the one I played the most, but I also found it very frustrating.

Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch

Currently playing:

Mining My Business

Favourite game of all time:
Wizball



GRAEME MASON

I spent a lot of time with the crazy PlayStation original – at the time, there hadn't been anything quite like Naughty Dog's *Crash Bandicoot*!

Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

Currently playing/covering:
Alien Isolation

Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4



Thanks to a *certain blue hedgehog*, the Nineties was filled with no end of anthropomorphised

platforming protagonists (say that last bit fast three times). One

of my personal favourites from this transformative era was *Crash Bandicoot* and not just because he was once known as Sonic's Ass during development.

Originally created by Naughty Dog, Crash personified everything that felt fresh and exciting during those early days of the PlayStation and you can still see elements of his adventures in later Naughty Dog games like *Jak And Daxter: The Precursor Legacy* and even *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*. It's a real treat then to speak to some of the geniuses involved with his early adventures on the first two PlayStation consoles.

If high-speed bandicoots aren't to your liking, there's plenty more to enjoy this issue, including a look behind the scenes of *The 7th Guest* and *Yes, Prime Minister* as well as Digital Eclipse's new project celebrating the works of Jeff Minter. We also chat to Richard Browne and Jonathan Griffiths about their fascinating careers in games, celebrate Takumi's excellent *Buggy Boy* and even find time to review Mike Chi's RetroTink 4K and Ubisoft's latest *Prince Of Persia* release.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.



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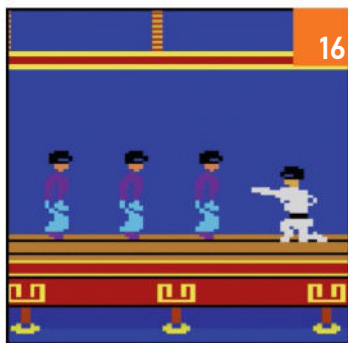
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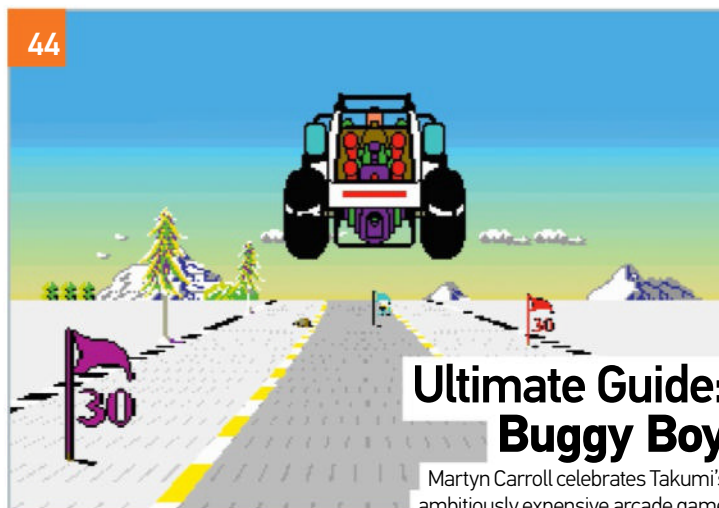
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Ultimate Guide: Buggy Boy

Martyn Carroll celebrates Takumi's ambitiously expensive arcade game



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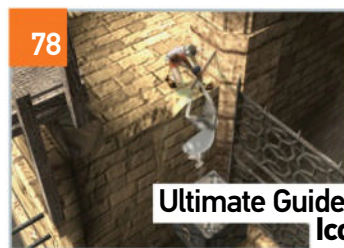
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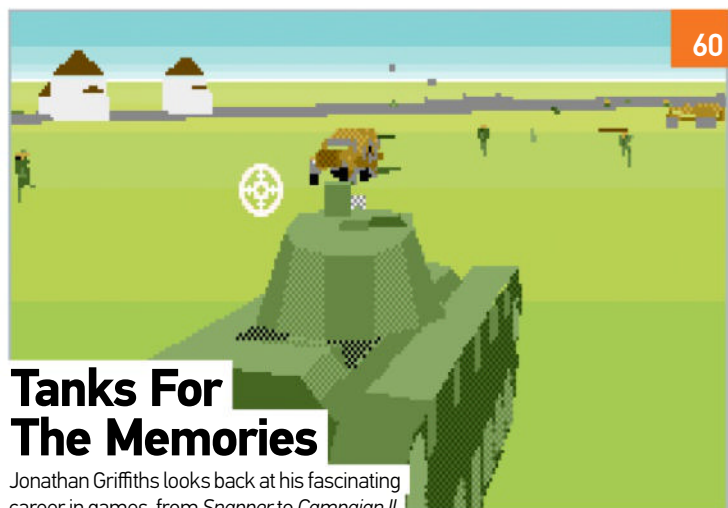
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Tanks For The Memories

Jonathan Griffiths looks back at his fascinating career in games, from *Snapper* to *Campaign II*



“Our strength is in producing a seamless experience ‘that just works’”

CHRIS SMITH

» The 400 Mini also supports 5200 games. “We wanted The 400 Mini to be a complete solution, so 5200 support was essential,” Chris says.

ATARI REVIVAL

The team at Retro Games Ltd on the incoming The 400 Mini

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Darren Melbourne and Chris Smith discuss their new mini system The 400 Mini

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This month Martyn Carroll speaks to the minds behind the new ZX Touch handheld

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Will Nick ever stop travelling through time? Who knows, but we do know he's currently in July 2007

We knew that Retro Games Ltd had big plans for 2024 but we weren't expecting its next system to drop so soon.

Nevertheless, that's exactly what's happening as The 400 Mini (based on Atari's range of popular 8-bit micros) is planned for 28 March.

While the machine can play games from a variety of Atari 8-bit systems, the team decided to go with the design of the Atari 400. “The form factor of the Atari 400 is utterly iconic,” explains Darren Melbourne, Retro Games Ltd's joint CEO. “Even the flat membrane keyboard of the original machine held a charm that was evocative of the early days of computing. It's instantly recognisable to the legions of Atari fans across the world and it was also one of the first home computers that many people owned, given its relatively affordable entry price.”

With its release imminent, we were interested to know how long The 400 Mini had been in development for. It turns out the turnaround has been quite impressive. “Product development took about a year and involved a number of disciplines from user interface and industrial design (the physical product), software, hardware and mechanical engineering, game licensing, package design and support assets,” explains Chris Smith, Retro Games Ltd's chief technology officer. “Our strength is in producing a seamless experience ‘that just works’, marrying authentic retro gaming with a modern and accessible interface, which is challenging in itself. So the CX-40 joystick (which we just had to use!) having only a single button was a particular problem, as was providing paddle and 5200 support, which required some creative thinking and was quite complex.”

As busy as the team has been, they've still found time to add new enhancements to the system that haven't been seen in its previous products – most notably the ability to pause and rewind games. “We try to always add something new to every product that we produce,” explains Darren. “Whilst the user



» Darren Melbourne is Retro Games Ltd's joint CEO and has worked on past systems like The C64 Mini.



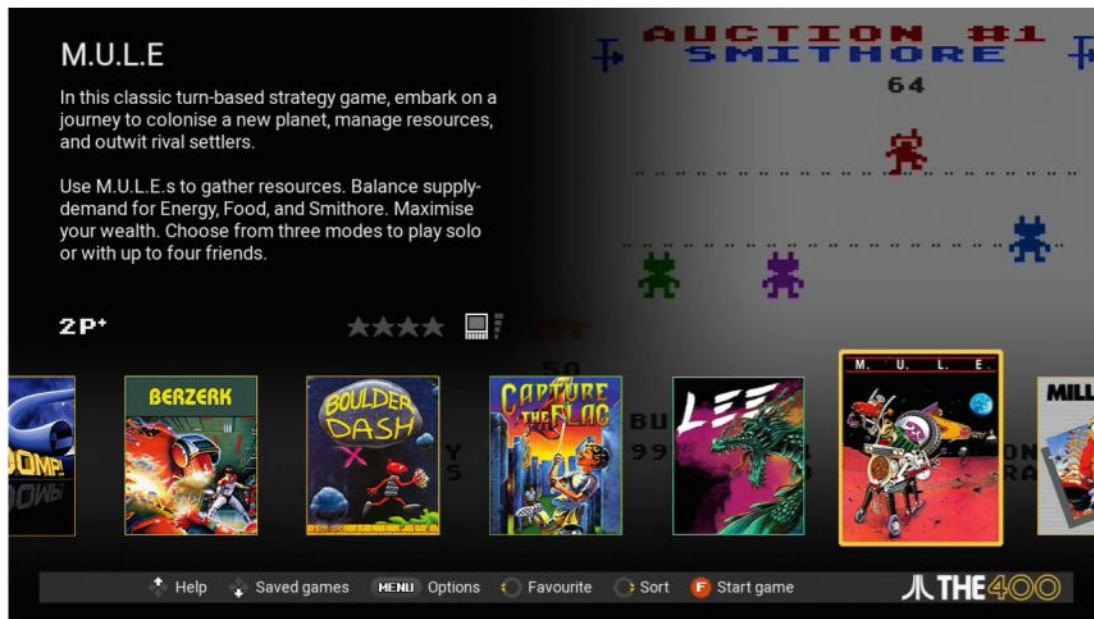
» Chris Smith is Retro Games Ltd's chief technology officer and has overseen devices like The A500 Mini.

is always looking for a product that connects them with their gaming heritage it's also critical that we keep an eye on modern gaming trends and functionality and try to include them into our products whenever possible.”

These quality-of-life improvements are important, as Chris explains. “In one sense The 400 Mini is a quality-of-life product over the original Atari 8-bit machines, with its instant loading of games, HDMI, reliability, small form factor, built-in save and resume, access to USB storage and so on. But in terms of aspects specific to this product, there is the choice of display frames to surround gameplay, tuneable pseudo-analogue controls to

» Darren Melbourne is confident there's a market for the new machine, telling us, “The Atari machines were beloved by millions of gamers across Europe.”





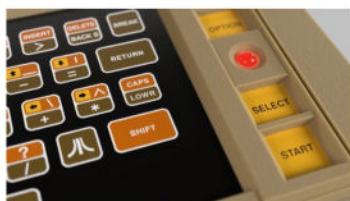
» [The 400 Mini] The presentation of The 400 Mini will be instantly familiar if you've owned devices like The A500 Mini.



» [The 400 Mini] Retro Games Ltd's new system includes some truly classic games, including the excellent *Star Raiders II*.

improve gameplay, and support built-in to the CX Stick for left or right-hand use."

Chris makes an interesting point about the new stick, as it has more buttons than the one packaged with Plaion's Atari 2600+. "The 400 Mini has a modern user interface and the keyboard is too small to be functional, so the single button of the CX-40 joystick is insufficient to drive the user interface and replace the keyboard for any games that require it," he explains. "We were determined not to spoil the look of the CX-40 joystick so we stripped the design back and then re-engineered it, repurposing features already



» Sadly, like previous mini systems from the company, you won't be able to use the keyboard.



» [The 400 Mini] We're big fans of *Miner 2049er*, so we're looking forward to booting it up.

present as additional buttons, so they are discreetly hidden." Chris also pointed out to us that it's usable with other platforms and that the rubber direction stick has been improved.

Of course, a system like The 400 Mini is only as good as its included games, and the team has chosen some great ones to bundle with the machine. "Obviously, licensing titles that are in many cases over 40 years old presents us with a huge challenge, but with detective work we are usually able to track down the titles that we want," explains Darren. "In some cases we have selected titles that were genre defining in their own right, with MULE and *Star Raiders II* being two such examples."

So what's next for Retro Games Ltd after The 400 Mini launches? "Well we have made clear we will announce a full-sized Amiga in Q4 2024 already," offers Paul Andrews, Retro Games Ltd's joint CEO. "It won't be a shock for us to say we are aiming to bring as many systems to the market as possible in the coming years. Some will be bigger retail releases such as the ones we have done so far, but a few might be smaller, more limited runs which might be preorder only, but we think fans will love to be able to own and revisit some of the lesser known systems as well as the larger brands. Plus we might just have a few other retro gaming surprises up our sleeves as well, but no spoilers on that just yet!" ✨

LEGENDS LOST

A trio of gaming legends have sadly passed away recently. Jay Scott was VP of Rockstar Vancouver and worked on titles like *Bully*. Brian Thalken, who was Rockstar Vancouver's president, told us, "Jay was such an interesting character. One day he walked into work with *Queens Of The Stone Age*. I was gobsmacked. Apparently he used to manage some of them." While Jennell Jaquays' name might not be familiar, the veteran of id Software, Coleco and other companies worked on the likes of *Quake II* and *Quake III Arena* and was the project lead on the ColecoVision's excellent version of *Donkey Kong*.

Scott Blackwood was an EA veteran and has worked on numerous games, including *Beetle Adventure Racing!* and the *Skate* series. "He was responsible for igniting so many careers over the years from *Beetle Adventure Racing!* to his *Marvel* years," Scott's friend Andy Santos told us. "I believe the *Skate* alumni and past colleagues would be filled with many fond memories and would like to wish him eternal skating and endless rounds of golf. He passed away in his favourite place, Isla Mujeres, Mexico." Our thoughts go out to the friends and family of Jay, Jennell and Scott.



Who is Iain Lee?

Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Crash, bang, wallop



After dancing on the edge of retro gaming, I have in recent months dived headfirst into the deep end. I'm buying stuff like there's no tomorrow and getting to retro events when I can.

I finally made it to The Centre For Computing History in Cambridge for a shindig they were hosting and had a whale of a time. The most recent event was Crash Live!, a do about 90 minutes away from me that was primarily celebrating the Spectrum in all its heavenly glory. I never had a Speccy but have always been a fan of them, and I just felt like wandering around some old computers and, let's be honest, some old people. There's definitely a look amongst male retro fans. Generally bald and with a thick beard. I salute you all and I hope my thick mane doesn't disturb you. I got good genes (thank you dad – RIP).

Despite being a gobby git on the telly and radio back in the day, I am inherently shy and overwhelmed by large groups of people. Noisy rooms physically hurt me. I put this down primarily to my ADHD. I've started wearing ear defender-type things to reduce that pain of noise. Great name for a band, you can have that one for free. However, when I go to these events, I am often stopped by people who used to watch *The 11 O'Clock Show* as kids (thanks for making me feel old), or they've seen one of my gaming TV shows. Some people are even fans of this nonsense I write every month. Oh, that reminds me, shout out to the chap that

wanted me to write about the Amiga. There you go, I did it! When these people recognise me, they often come up for a handshake and a chat. And I absolutely love this. Firstly, it's always heart-warming to hear people say nice things about work I did 20 years ago, and secondly, I've met some really interesting and lovely people.

One of the highlights of Crash Live! was I finally got to meet Neil from RMCretro. His channel played a huge part in me starting my own pod and I have to be honest; I was a little star-struck. Thankfully Holly, who also works at The Cave (a place I need to visit soon) put me at ease and introduced me to the great man.

I guess what I'm trying to say is, for a socially awkward person like me, I feel I have found a tribe. I've been made to feel welcome. The gaming element of it is actually secondary. I hardly touched any of the machines. I am at heart a voyeur so I am very happy just looking at the computers doing their magic. I've discovered I like sitting anonymously in talks by gamers and creators, and having nice people come up and say hello. If there's a coffee and a burger available, all the better.

So, thank you to everyone who puts these events on. I know organising something like that can take a year in the planning. And if you see me talking to myself whilst wearing ear buds in 2024, do come and say hello! ★

“For a socially awkward person like me, I feel I have found a tribe. I've been made to feel welcome”



Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?

Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Generations apart



Retro means different things to different generations. Though I'm now unfathomably old, I still think of a lot of the games I played in my 20s and 30s as 'new'. That weird time-speeding-up effect we get as we grow older means that the past three decades feel like they lasted about two weeks, whereas the preceding 20 years seem like another lifetime ago.

Take *Doom* as an example. I still think of *Doom* as a 'modern' game. Likewise, *Super Mario 64*. I mean, even *Sonic The Hedgehog* – the Mega Drive original – seems somehow relatively modern to me. Why do I categorise that alongside *Horizon Forbidden West* instead of *Manic Miner*, while the likes of *Chuckie Egg*, *The Hobbit* and *Space Invaders* are what I class as 'retro' games?

When I started writing *Digitiser* I was a mere slip of a 21 year old. It was 1993, and I occasionally wrote about 'old games' that to me felt like ancient history – though most of them had been released barely a decade before.

A 21 year old here in the space year 2024 AD was 11 a decade ago, so does that mean they view *Grand Theft Auto V*, *Dark Souls II*, *Destiny* and other 2014 releases as retro games? I mean, it's insane to me that *Destiny* is ten years old. Surely it came out about three years ago, tops? *The Last Of Us* is even older – that was released in 2013!

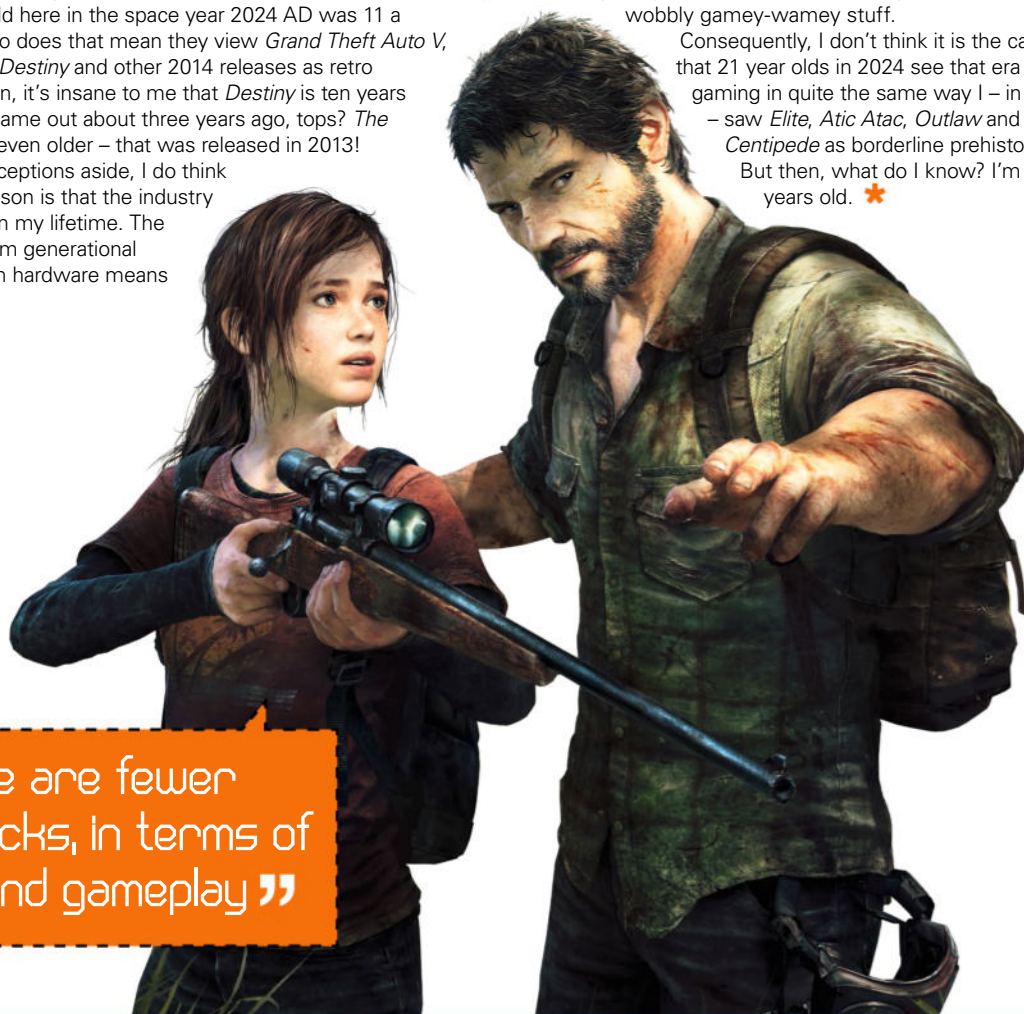
Varying perceptions aside, I do think part of the reason is that the industry has changed in my lifetime. The lack of quantum generational leaps between hardware means

that there are fewer seismic shocks, in terms of graphics and gameplay. Games also tend to hang around longer. *The Last Of Us* got a recent remaster, whereas *Destiny* rumbled along for three years before *Destiny 2* replaced it. *GTA V* has been kept alive through *Grand Theft Auto Online*, and you can now even play *Goat Simulator* on your TV remote, probably.

With games commonly receiving remastered editions, or continuing to thrive through online additions and DLC, publishers are now more reluctant to declare them dead and buried. It's understandable, given how much more games cost than they did in previous years. Part of the development of many modern games accounts for their potential longevity; how can they continue to make money years after their release?

However, I also think that without the very clear lines in the sand between generations – the N64 and PlayStation, for instance, were a clear step into 3D territory from the Mega Drive and Super NES – makes it less easy to know where one generation stops and the next starts. Recent gaming history is less like geological strata, and more a big ball of wobbly-wobbly gamey-wamey stuff.

Consequently, I don't think it is the case that 21 year olds in 2024 see that era of gaming in quite the same way I – in 1993 – saw *Elite*, *Atic Atac*, *Outlaw* and *Centipede* as borderline prehistoric. But then, what do I know? I'm 86 years old. ✨



“There are fewer seismic shocks, in terms of graphics and gameplay”

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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» The ZX Touch designer Goran Radan, who previously developed the popular ZX-VGA-JOY interface.



» The ZX Touch features a 7-inch touchscreen, eight tactile buttons and an analog thumbstick.



» Distributor Thomas Eberle sells the ZX Touch through his Sintech online shop.

ZX Touch

Martyn Carroll talks to the chaps behind the new Spectrum handheld

Banishing memories of the Vega+ debacle, the ZX Touch is a brand-new handheld for playing Spectrum games on the go, that's available to buy right now. To find out more about it, we caught up with the device's developer Goran Radan and its distributor Thomas Eberle.



Can you briefly describe the history of the ZX Touch and how it came to be?

Goran: For the past decade my professional focus has been developing embedded devices with graphical interfaces. Personally, I'm passionate about vintage computers, particularly the ZX Spectrum, so creating a Spectrum handheld seemed like a perfect fit. The first prototype was completed two years ago and I did it entirely for fun. Then I shared it with Thomas, who's a huge Spectrum enthusiast and knows the community much better than I do. Without his energy and enthusiasm, the ZX Touch would have never become a product for market.

Thomas: I first heard about the idea of a Spectrum handheld when the Vega+ project was announced, but I wasn't convinced. At the end of 2022 I was talking with

Goran about potential projects and he told me that he was already working on something new...

What lessons were learnt from what happened with the Vega+?

Thomas: We didn't want to create another crowdfunding campaign, where people would be asking every day about progress. So we agreed to keep silent until it was ready.

Goran: I'm not a huge fan of the crowdfunding model or taking preorders before the product is ready. The Vega+ has been a huge burden for us. We couldn't even conduct proper market research because we knew the Vega+ made the community quite suspicious towards similar projects.

The device comes with a number of homebrew titles pre-installed. Did you consider

attempting to licence any commercial games?

Thomas: The problem is finding the right people to contact. However, the ZX Touch is a living project and we're working on obtaining permissions for more games.

Goran: It wasn't our intention to attract users with built-in games, but we wanted to ensure the user could experience the device moments after taking it out of the box. In other words, we wanted to avoid the situation where you buy a toy for your kid, but batteries aren't included, and it's a bank holiday.

How has the feedback been from early adopters?

Thomas: Mostly people have just told us that they're very happy they bought it. But some have written whole reviews and given us ideas where we can improve.

» There are 22 homebrew games included that represent a decent mix of old and new releases.



“The ZX Touch is designed to be a dedicated Spectrum handheld”

GORAN RADAN

So with the next firmware update there will be some improvements.

Goran: The ZX Touch is one of those products where you can only feel its real value when you pick it up and use it. I felt that after building the first prototype. I've been reading the comments on social-media groups and they've been immensely positive so far.

Some people have questioned the £219 price. What contributes to the system's cost?

Thomas: When Goran introduced me to the project, I was hoping for a selling price of €100. But I'm just the seller and Goran made it very clear about the reality of component costs!

Goran: I've been working in the development and production

of electronics for 25 years. My experiences have shown that when a relatively complicated product is made in small batches, the price calculations are significantly different and you cannot just calculate the production costs and add the profit. So the calculations were made according to the standard procedures we use in my company Elmar Electronic, but on lower profitability margins. It's not my intention to make a very profitable device.

How do you respond to people who say, "Well you can already play Spectrum games on this or that handheld?"

Goran: The ZX Touch is designed to be a dedicated Spectrum handheld. The Spectrum is not a console but a computer with a mountain of games which depend



» Under the hood. A quick peek at the innards of the ZX Touch.

a lot on keyboard input, so I made sure that the keyboard is as accessible as possible. There are also two small keyboards with the most frequently used keys always present on the screen. Unlike other devices that emulate the Spectrum, the screen works at a 50Hz refresh rate, not 60Hz, so text and scrolling objects are authentic and smooth just like on a CRT. Plus, we've committed ourselves to constantly keep improving the device and respond to new user requirements.

How would you sum up the current state of the Spectrum scene for our readers?

Thomas: When it comes to new games it's even better than it was in the Nineties, and the release of the ZX Touch, Spectrum Next and so many other machines show that there's considerable interest in hardware as well as software. I don't think there has been a better time in the last 30 years. ★

For more information and to buy the device, visit zx-touch.com

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

JULY 2007 – It's a solid summer, with dependable favourites delivering again and surprise packages showing up to delight those willing to take a chance on them.

You're in the passenger seat of Nick Thorpe's time machine – time to buckle up!



**NEWS
JULY 2007**

On 7 July, musicians collaborated to raise awareness of climate change with 12 Live Earth concerts across the globe, with performers at Wembley Stadium including Madonna, Foo Fighters and Metallica. Other major acts included The Police and Kanye West in the USA, Linkin Park in Japan, Snoop Dogg in Germany and Lenny Kravitz in Brazil. The event received mixed reactions internationally, with criticism directed towards the event's carbon emissions and uncertainty over how the proceeds were distributed.

Vladimir Putin decreed that Russia would suspend its observance of the Treaty On Conventional Armed Forces in Europe on 14 July. The Cold War-era agreement stipulated limits on weaponry within the region. Russia later halted participation completely in 2015, and formally withdrew from the treaty in 2023, prompting NATO members to withdraw.

Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman passed away on 30 July at the age of 89. Beginning his career as a screenwriter, he earned fame as the director of *The Virgin Spring* and the writer and director of *Through A Glass Darkly*, both Oscar winners. He wrote and directed a further Oscar-winning film, *Fanny And Alexander*.



» [Wii] Everyone loves *Resident Evil 4*, and with Wii controls it was better than ever.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 2007

This is normally a bumper time of year for previews, as the news from E3 makes its way to the printed page.

However, 2007 saw the debut of the revamped E3 Media And Business Summit, a much smaller event taking place in July rather than May, so it was up to the summer releases to keep players interested. Fortunately, they were up to the job.

On the Xbox 360, *Forza Motorsport 2* received scores

of 5/5 from 360, 9/10 from *Edge*, 9/10 from *Official Xbox 360 Magazine* and 8/10 from *games™* – enough to claim pole position for the month. The official magazine felt that it was “not that innovative, but what you’re getting instead is a super-slick, very well presented and polished racing game”. *Edge* opined that it “fails to present a convincing model for how the offline sim-racing game can move on” but that its “core driving is so perfectly built, and its online integration so well formed”,

that it earned its high score. For Xbox 360 owners who wanted to take their racing off-road, *Colin McRae: Dirt* offered a suitable alternative. It received 8/10 from the official magazine, which felt it to be “a great all-round arcade racer”, but *games™* wasn’t quite as impressed citing its “anaemic online options and unfocused single-player structure” and lack of terrain deformation, scoring it 7/10. It also received 8/10 from *Edge*, 4/5 from 360 and 7/10 from X360. Surprise Xbox 360 package of the month was *Wartech*:

Senko No Ronde, a one-on-one competitive shoot-em-up that received 4/5 from 360, 8/10 from *games™*, 7/10 from X360 and 7/10 from *Edge*. 360 praised Ubisoft for publishing the game, which it noted had “thankfully been left untouched”, but *games™* worried that the £50 price point may put players off “such a niche and potentially short-lived title”.

Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition gave players a fantastic reason to revisit Leon Kennedy’s Spanish sojourn, with Nintendo’s

» [Xbox 360] With a second top quality entry, *Forza Motorsport* was established as a series to watch.



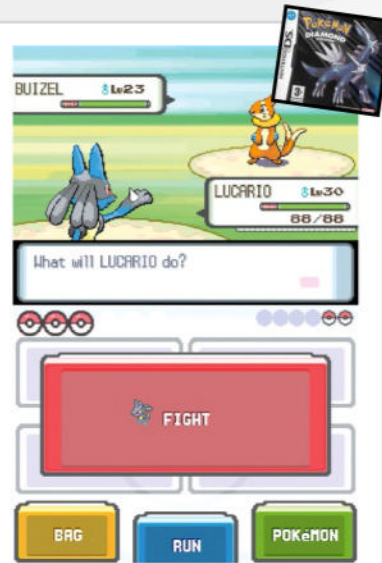
innovative controller allowing for enhanced weapon aiming and motion-based QTE sequences. The *Official Nintendo Magazine* gave it 94% and *nRevolution* 9.4/10, the latter calling it "the ultimate version of one of the best videogames ever made". PS3 owners also got a revamp of a recent favourite thanks to Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden Sigma*. *Official PlayStation Magazine* gave it 9/10 and *Play* gave it 88%, with the latter saying that "irrespective of platform" the game is "an absolute classic". *PSU3* was also impressed and gave it 8/10, but felt that it "really isn't significantly better than the original Xbox version" in graphical terms.

DS owners got to enjoy an embarrassment of riches, starting with *Pokémon: Diamond & Pearl*. The latest critter-battling quest earned 8/10 from *Edge*, which said that "there's still nothing like *Pokémon*", though it criticised the games for being "overstuffed with too many legacy features, too many of which (like the random battles) have been outmoded". It also scored 92% in *Official Nintendo*, which praised it for being a "huge, detailed adventure" with "fantastic" online features, despite being

"effectively a fancy remake of past *Pokémon* adventures".

Players seeking a familiar face in an oddball game could try *Metroid Prime Pinball*, which finally received its belated European release. *Official Nintendo* gave it 80% and *nRevolution* 8.7/10, with the latter feeling that "traditional elements have been fused exceptionally well with Samus' world". *Brothers In Arms DS* was another surprise package this month, with *games™* declaring the handheld interpretation of the World War II shooter to be "far better than we ever imagined" in an 8/10 review. Scoring the game 9.0/10, *nRevolution* wrote, "Not only are the controls fantastic but the design choices also show that a lot of thought has been put into the way people play handheld games."

Over on the PSP, *Play* felt that *Crush* "is amazing but makes you feel stupid". The innovative puzzle game allowed you to squash 3D spaces into 2D and required strong spatial thinking, and earned 80% despite the reviewer's admission of being "just a bit rubbish at it". It also



» [DS] Lucario had already appeared in a *Pokémon* movie before making its in-game debut in *Pokémon Diamond & Pearl*.

scored 8/10 in *Official PlayStation Magazine*, 7/10 in *games™* and 7/10 in *Edge*, which felt it to be "a step in the right direction" given the "lack of originality" in the PSP's software library.

Will August continue the strong summer that 2007 has so far delivered? You know where to find out, same time next month. ★

» [Xbox 360] If you've never played *Wartech*, you'll want to correct that error – it's a very unique game.



» [PS3] Ryu Hayabusa arrived on Sony's latest console, a few years after the classic Xbox game.

CHARTS

JULY 2007

XBOX 360

- 1 – **Command & Conquer 3** (EA)
- 2 – **Spider-Man 3** (Activision)
- 3 – **Crackdown** (Microsoft)
- 4 – **Gears Of War** (Microsoft)
- 5 – **Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2** (Ubisoft)



PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 – **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion** (Ubisoft)
- 2 – **MotorStorm** (Sony)
- 3 – **Resistance: Fall Of Man** (Sony)
- 4 – **NBA 2K7** (Take2)
- 5 – **FEAR** (Vivendi)



WII

- 1 – **Wii Play** (Nintendo)
- 2 – **Spider-Man 3** (Activision)
- 3 – **Sonic And The Secret Rings** (Sega)
- 4 – **The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess** (Nintendo)
- 5 – **Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07** (EA)



MUSIC

- 1 – **Umbrella** (Rihanna feat Jay-Z)
- 2 – **Big Girls Don't Cry** (Fergie)
- 3 – **Foundations** (Kate Nash)
- 4 – **The Way I Are** (Timbaland feat Doe/Keri Hilson)
- 5 – **Fluorescent Adolescent** (Arctic Monkeys)



THIS MONTH IN...



games™

How much was E3 downsized in 2007? "At last year's event, more than 400 companies took part; the list this year contains just 32 names," *games™* reports, noting id Software as one of "only two indie developers" present.



Edge

"Consumer distrust continues to grow as DRM makes software less reliable, and not only restricts its use but may also monitor it as well," says *Edge*. Despite this, publishers continue to employ technologies like Denuvo today.



PC Gamer

Playing *Hellgate: London* online? *PC Gamer* reports, "Those who pay the \$10 monthly fee will get a first-class experience," including no server queues, better loot and harder modes. "Those who don't are left with cattle-class play."

PLAYER ENEMY

Kung-Fu Master

PUNCHING ABOVE ITS WEIGHT

» RETROREVIVAL



» ATARI 2600 » 1987 » ACTIVISION

The copy of *Kung-Fu Master* that I own may just be the least ostentatious game cartridge of all time. Its white label has no

illustration at all, just black text detailing basic information about the game – most of which is copyright acknowledgements. I should have recognised the Activision name from games like *Pitfall!* and *Ice Hockey*, but other than that there was nothing to suggest that the game was anything special.

Yet when I booted up *Kung-Fu Master*, I was blown away. It's not that I hadn't seen anything better – this was deep into the Mega Drive era, after all – but I certainly wasn't expecting a game like this from the humble Atari. The stage graphics were detailed, the characters looked convincingly human, and there was even background music playing throughout the game. What's more, the beat-'em-up action had plenty of variety, with different kinds of enemies that looked just as good as the player character and even bosses to battle. I thought I knew what my console could do, and *Kung-Fu Master* exceeded all of my expectations.

I hadn't played Irem's arcade original when I first encountered the Atari 2600 version of *Kung-Fu Master*, so I didn't appreciate just how closely Activision had managed to replicate it until much later. That also meant that I wasn't aware of the flaws – most notably the inability to jump kick, which certainly makes it harder to deal with certain enemies like the floating orbs that start appearing on the second floor. I just found alternative ways to deal with them, but I could see how players familiar with the arcade and NES versions would find that unsatisfying. Despite that, I can't help but love *Kung-Fu Master* – it was impressive the first time I saw it, and everything I've learned about the Atari 2600's capabilities in the decades since has convinced me that it's a minor programming miracle. *

2





THE EVOLUTION OF: CRASH BANDICOOT

THE EVOLUTION OF

CRASH BANDICOOT

"THEY MADE CRASH A BANDICOOT BECAUSE IT WAS A UNIQUE CONCEPT, AND THE IDEA OF HIM BEING ORANGE AND BLUE REALLY WORKED TOO"

DAN AREY



ONE OF THE FIRST POLYGON PLATFORMERS AND A DEFINING PLAYSTATION TITLE, CRASH BANDICOOT MARKED THE BEGINNING OF A FRANCHISE THAT CONTINUES TO THIS DAY. CREATIVES DAN AREY AND JON BURTON EXPLAIN HOW THE POPULAR SERIES EVOLVED

WORDS BY RORY MILNE



» Nerd Ninjas creative director Dan Arey worked on *Crash Bandicoot 2: Warped* and *Crash Team Racing*.



» Jon Burton had many roles on *Wrath Of Cortex* and oversaw *Twinsanity*; he's now CEO of 10:10 Games.

By the autumn of 1994, most popular gaming genres had begun to transition from sprites to polygons, with the likes of *Virtua Racing*, *Virtua Fighter* and *Descent* respectively showing how racing games, beat-'em-ups and shooters could work in 3D. Polygon platform games hadn't yet been tackled, however, and so when Naughty Dog founders Andy Gavin and Jason Rubin relocated their company from Boston to California they spent the trip coming up with concepts for a 3D platformer that would ultimately become *Crash Bandicoot*.

At almost exactly the same time, Nintendo began producing *Super Mario 64*. The two games were subsequently released in 1996 – *Crash* just months after *Mario*. But where Mario moved through a relatively open world, Crash took a more fixed-route approach.

Future Naughty Dog developer Dan Arey was working at Crystal Dynamics at the



» [PlayStation] *Crash Bandicoot* was one of the first attempts to make a platformer work in 3D.



» [PlayStation] For those of you who were wondering, a bandicoot is a marsupial.

► time, but he took close notice of both titles. “When *Mario 64* came out it shifted everybody’s thinking. We all realised that 3D platforming was amazing, but also that you had to do it in a controlled way,” Dan explains. “If you think about it, *Crash Bandicoot* was going down 3D roads with occasional 2D side-ways elements. But everything was very focussed in terms of mechanics, and that was really the brainchild of Naughty Dog founders Andy Gavin and Jason Rubin. We saw some early demos when I was at Crystal Dynamics, and we were asking ourselves how they were getting so many polygons on the PlayStation. What they had done was pre-calculate the polygons you couldn’t see from a fixed-camera viewpoint, so it looked like there were many more polygons being pushed on the system than ever before.”

A less-technical point of interest was Naughty Dog’s hero, an obscure marsupial called a bandicoot, which as Dan points out was a choice based on a need for novelty. “You know it’s interesting, Bob Rafei was the art director and of course Jason Rubin is an artist as well, but they had another artist who did some concepts for them, and then they ran with those,” Dan recalls. “They made Crash a bandicoot because it was a unique concept, and the idea of him being orange and blue really worked too. That was just a wonderful colour combination. But a marsupial made sense, I think. Marsupials are down under, so you had this cool Australian connection. Then Jason Rubin

“THERE WAS THIS COMMITMENT TO HUMOUR, AND THE BODY SLAM WAS JUST FUNNY. WE THOUGHT THAT WAS VERY WWE”
DAN AREY

had these wonderful characters like N Gin and all of the others. So that was all down to the ingenious creativity of Naughty Dog’s art group and its director.”

Equally important to *Crash Bandicoot*’s design was its inclusion of cargo crates, which as well as containing collectables and continues were fun to smash by spinning into them like Warner Bros’ *Tasmanian Devil*. “Naughty Dog had a thing called adaptive difficulty, where the game got easier if you were struggling, but then it got harder if you got better at it,” Dan observes. “A good example would be with the crates. Smashing them was how you got fruit, but that could also get you a continue point. The amazing thing was that the system knew how many times you were dying in any one level and where, and it could make those crates whatever it wanted them to be. So if you died a lot then a crate that would otherwise just be a bunch of fruit would be changed into a continue point, and that would let you get over a hump.”



STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

SUPERB SPIN-OFFS: 1999-2002

FROM FRANTIC RACING TO CRAZY CHALLENGES



CRASH TEAM RACING

The first racer set in the *Crash Bandicoot* world features tracks based on the platformers that preceded it, and Crash, his allies and foes as contestants. The crates from the earlier titles are scattered around each course, each of which contains weapons and power-ups.



CRASH BASH

The insane challenges in *Crash Bash* range from chucking TNT at rivals to pushing them off icebergs! It's best played against other people, but the fact that it includes everything from hopping around on pogo sticks to driving tanks means that its solo mode is fun too.



CRASH BANDICOOT: THE HUGE ADVENTURE

Rather than attempting to design a 3D title for the Game Boy Advance, the designers of *The Huge Adventure* opted to make a 2D side-on platformer. In all other respects it feels like a *Crash* title, with fruit to collect, crates to smash and familiar foes to spin attack.

In the wake of its release, *Crash Bandicoot* reviewed well and topped the charts, and it ultimately became one of the PlayStation's best-selling titles. Its success ensured that a sequel was green lit, and the creation of *Crash Bandicoot 2* coincided with Dan joining Naughty Dog. Its levels were split between hubs that allowed any of their stages to be attempted in any order, a process that Naughty Dog dubbed "wide linear". "The idea of it being wide linear was so that we could still tell a story," Dan reasons. "With the *Crash Bandicoot* games we took great pride in storytelling.

So the hub system allowed us to tell a story in little chunks, but it also allowed the player to pick which levels they wanted to play in which order for the first time. So if you had a hard time in a level you could come back to it later and go to another level. It opened up a lot of stuff like that, but we were still able to control that by which hub warps were active.

So the hubs allowed players to make choices within a semi-linear system."

The decision to have hubs containing a selection of stages created a need for players to have a method to activate *new* hubs. The solution chosen was to require a crystal to be collected from each level in a hub to complete it, but some crystals were hidden down left or right forks in roads, meaning that if you took a wrong turn you had to replay that level. Dan recalls a number of advantages that came from this mechanic. "We were trying to evolve



» [PlayStation] Smashing crates is fundamental to *Crash Bandicoot*; it's how you get collectables and mark continues.



» [PlayStation] *Crash Bandicoot's* level structure is linear, at the end of each stage you warp to the next.

» [PlayStation] The high jump move introduced in *Crash Bandicoot 2* lets you leap higher and further than normal.



» [PlayStation] Hub areas where you can choose which level to play were introduced in *Crash Bandicoot 2*.



» [PlayStation] You progress from hub to hub in *Crash Bandicoot 2* by finding the crystals in each of their stages.

► our system," Dan considers. "We really wanted people to explore; we wanted to include that opportunity. The levels took a lot of work to design, so we wanted to reuse them as much as possible. Replayability was also a big part of it, and we definitely wanted to have more player choice. We were trying to break the mould of linear gameplay. Everybody understood 2D linear gameplay where you can go up, down, left or right. But in 3D you naturally wanted to go in other directions and explore, although we weren't going to be wide open like *Mario 64*, because we wanted to control the gameplay. That was why we called it wide linear, because it allowed some choice."

As well as its hubs and junctions, *Crash Bandicoot 2* differentiated itself from its predecessor in other ways. Crash was given moves and attacks for the follow-up that he hadn't had in his original outing. More powerful jumps allowed for more verticality and further apart platforms to be incorporated into the sequel's levels, while body slam and sliding attacks allowed the hero to take out foes with lower or upper body armour from either above or below. "We wanted to make sure that you had those extra abilities to jump higher and longer distances," Dan reflects. "Another thing that was very important was the idea that everything was really precise. The high jump and double jump distances were very specifically planned. There were certain places that you could only reach if you

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

SUPERB SPIN-OFFS: 2003-2004

PORTABLE ADVENTURES AND CRASH'S KART-BASED SEQUEL



CRASH BANDICOOT 2: N-TRANCED

The sequel to *The Huge Adventure* has nods to level designs and mechanics from *Warped* and *Wrath Of Cortex*. Although it's 2D, *N-Tranced* has into-the-screen and out-of-the-screen stages like *Huge Adventure*, and a cool jetpack level that recalls the Atari 2600 classic *HERO*.



CRASH NITRO KART

Essentially *Crash Team Racing* for the PS2, *Crash Nitro Kart* nonetheless differentiates itself in several respects. As well as new tracks it has new crates. Some of these activate boost pads and set traps for rivals, while others give you multiple power-ups and weapons.



CRASH BANDICOOT PURPLE: RIPTO'S RAMPAGE

One half of a *Spyro* crossover, *Ripto's Rampage* has 2D platforming like *The Huge Adventure*, but its main challenge comes from its minigames. Some of these channel coin-ops like *Breakout* and *Toobin'*, while others set tasks that range from shooting sheep to pumping iron.

used those. But more generally we were adding abilities to freshen things up. We had a fairly irreverent group, and we had a hilarious time. There was this commitment to humour, and the body slam was just funny. We thought that was very WWE. WWE was just this manic, crazy, over-the-top world that everybody loved at Naughty Dog, and we took the body slam from that."

This wacky humour, Crash's new moves and his sequel's hub level structure were applauded by both critics and gamers when *Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back* came out. The follow-up received critical acclaim and sales in the millions, and so its developers quite reasonably took a break. With the exception of Dan, who instead put together a pitch for a third *Crash* title in which the marsupial hero travelled through time and around the globe.

"The idea for *Crash Bandicoot: Warped* came from the fact that I'm a time-travel nut!" Dan exclaims. "I started designing it from scratch when everybody else took a month off at the end of developing *Crash 2*. It allowed us to open up for a new look and have fun with that. We knew that there were going to be cool things to do like running along The Great Wall Of China, and that became one of the themes of that world. It really was an expansion of the universe, and it was just more fun, because we could put Crash in these unique situations with unique visuals. Also *Crash 2* was a global hit, so *Warped* had to be more inclusive of other parts of the world."

The innovative design for *Warped* also included stages where instead of playing as Crash players took charge of his little sister Coco. But rather than featuring platforming challenges like those that made up the majority of the game, Coco's levels instead involved manoeuvring her Jet Ski through pirate-infested waters, taking out blimps with her biplane, fighting a boss in outer space and riding her pet tiger over The Great Wall Of China. "It was fun adding another playable character to the world," Dan enthuses, "although there was a separation where, unlike Crash, Coco only appeared in non-platforming levels. That was about giving Coco her own flavour in the game. The World War I biplane gives me some PTSD! That was incredibly hard to develop because it was so fundamentally different from so much of the game. Coco riding on the tiger on The Great Wall Of China was one of the first endless runners, and we were doing that way back in 1998! So we were doing that early. It was really fun, force forward is always fun. It gave a different tone to the moment. You weren't in full control, ►

» [PlayStation] As with its predecessors, *Crash Bandicoot: Warped* has a number 2.5D stages mixed in with its fully 3D levels.



» [PlayStation] The mediaeval era at the start of *Crash Bandicoot: Warped* looks very different to the earlier games.



"COCO RIDING ON THE TIGER ON THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA WAS ONE OF THE FIRST ENDLESS RUNNERS, AND WE WERE DOING THAT WAY BACK IN 1998!"

DAN AREY



» [PlayStation] Non-platforming challenges like *Warped*'s motorbike racing are a staple of the series.





» [PlayStation 2] Flying a firefly into battle is just one of the challenges in *Wrath Of Cortex* where you're not on foot.



» [PlayStation 2] Riding out-of-control mine carts never gets old, and it works particularly well in *Wrath Of Cortex*.



» [PlayStation 2] In *Wrath Of Cortex*, Coco is playable in some platforming levels and she knows martial arts.

► but you were in *some* control. You were trying to minimise your mistakes and you were trying to memorise the level. All of that internal progression was really fun."

Coco didn't get all the fun in *Warped*, however, as Crash was set far more out-there, over-the-top and high-octane tests of skill than he had in either of his previous appearances. Besides scuba diving, riding on a baby T-rex in prehistoric times and dispatching foes with a fruit bazooka, he also raced a motorbike along the highways of Fifties America in a leather bikers' jacket, which ultimately became the focus of the follow-up's box art. "I'm not even sure I can even defend giving Crash a bazooka!" Dan jokes. "But by the time of *Warped* we just wanted to try something new, and the T-rex and bazooka were what we went with. Then Crash's motorcycle. It's funny that it was put on the cover of the game, because it was really just a joke. You know, wouldn't it be fun to have Crash riding a motorcycle? It was crazy. But that's what happens when you've already done two games and you're just a little bit punch drunk by the third one!"

As things turned out, the third *Crash* game was also Naughty Dog's last core *Crash* title, although it created the protagonist's debut racer *Crash Team Racing* in parallel with *Warped*. Both games did well, with *Warped* in particular getting unanimous praise from reviewers and outselling its immediate predecessor. But after *Warped*, Naughty Dog moved onto other franchises, and Crash's next core title – *The Wrath Of Cortex* – was handled

by Traveller's Tales instead. Coco returned, but unlike in *Warped* she had martial arts moves and faced platforming challenges, as former TT director Jon Burton notes. "I think Coco having unique moves certainly added more variety to the gameplay," Jon muses. "We were also keen to take the series forwards without reinventing the wheel, so we decided that having Coco in some platforming levels in *Wrath Of Cortex* as well as riding or flying around like she did in *Warped* was an obvious direction to take."

Of the many power-ups in *Wrath Of Cortex*, one of the coolest came in the form of footwear known as Sneak Shoes. These handy trainers allowed Crash to tiptoe over suspended bridges made from Nitro Crates without setting them off. However this explosive hazard was only found in certain bonus levels and not in the game's main stages, meaning that the Sneak Shoes didn't get a lot of use in those. Jon doesn't remember what the exact reason for this was, but he does have some theories. "It was probably felt that it could be too complex a puzzle for the main route," Jon ponders, "and that we should keep that reasonably easy and leave the more challenging puzzles for the bonus stages. Or it might have been because we were originally thinking about having the worlds played in any order, so we couldn't have

"WE REALLY FELT THAT THE CRASH SERIES HAD TO MAKE THE LEAP INTO A MORE FREE-ROAMING DESIGN"
JON BURTON

a puzzle based on Sneak Shoes in the main levels if you hadn't already collected them. But honestly, it could even have been to do with the main stages largely

having a third-person perspective and not a consistently side-on viewpoint like the bonus levels."

In addition to power-ups, *Wrath Of Cortex* boasted a wealth of vehicles for Crash and Coco to explore levels in that took their lead from earlier *Crash* titles while upping the ante. Of the aerial models chosen for the game, a mechanical firefly stood out for its originality, although *Wrath Of Cortex*'s one-person armed submarine ran it a close second. The task of designing the vehicles for *Wrath Of Cortex* fell to someone other than Jon, but he's fairly sure about how they came to be in the game and the benefits they brought. "I wasn't involved in those design choices directly," Jon clarifies, "but I think it was probably as simple as us asking our concept artist to come up with some flying vehicle ideas for *Wrath Of Cortex*, and then us looking them over and picking the ones that looked the most interesting. In sequels it's only natural to want to take something further or to have more of it than the original had. The obvious benefit of having those types of vehicles was that they made the game more varied, and they also helped to give it more interesting game mechanics."

As the previous core *Crash* games had done before it, *Crash Bandicoot*:

» [PlayStation 2] Unlike earlier titles, *Crash Twinsanity* has an open world where you have freedom to roam.



THE EVOLUTION OF: CRASH BANDICOOT

» [PlayStation 2] One of the characters you play as in *Crash Twinsanity* is villain Neo Cortex's talented niece Nina.



» [PlayStation 2] You have to work together with Crash's archenemy Cortex in a number of *Crash Twinsanity*'s levels.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

SUPERB SPIN-OFFS: 2005-2007

MORE OFFERINGS FROM THE ICONIC MARSUPIAL



CRASH TAG TEAM RACING

Far from just a kart racer, *Crash Tag Team Racing* distinguishes itself with a mechanic where you merge with an opponent and their vehicle, and get a mounted cannon to take out the other drivers with. It also has platforming and FPS minigames, and unlockable cartoons.



CRASH BOOM BANG!

Unusual in that progression relies on rolling dice to move between squares like in a board game, *Crash Boom Bang!* is essentially a series of minigames. The DS title's varied challenges include blowing into the system to inflate balloons and a stylus-based *Whack-A-Mole*.



CRASH OF THE TITANS

Part platformer/part beat-'em-up, *Crash Of The Titans* sets tasks such as collecting a substance called Mojo to earn new moves and defeating a set number of foes. There are also bosses called Titans that take some beating, but if you manage you can take control of them.



» [PC] Just one of Crash's newfound abilities in *Crash Bandicoot 4* is his talent for grinding on vines and rails.



» [PC] The power-ups in *Crash Bandicoot 4* include the temporary ability to make platforms solid or intangible.



» [PC] One of the most useful power-ups in *Crash Bandicoot 4* lets you spin-glide across great distances.

► *Wrath Of Cortex* sold millions of copies. Critics highlighted its levels and vehicles, and particular mention was made of its PS2 visuals outdoing those of its PS1 predecessors by some considerable margin. Following its success, Traveller's Tales produced Crash's next core title *Crash Twinsanity*. Jon decided it should be more open world than pathway focussed, as the previous instalments had been, in order to allow players to more fully explore its universe and to keep the franchise fresh. "We really felt that the *Crash* series had to make the leap into a more free-roaming design," Jon remembers. "A lot of its contemporaries were already doing this, and we didn't want the gameplay in *Crash Twinsanity* – and by extension the series – to feel outdated."

Just as impressive as *Crash Twinsanity's* scope for exploration was its focus on innovative character-based mechanics. As well as Crash, players could play as his archenemy Neo Cortex and Cortex's delinquent niece Nina. In the case of Neo, this involved firing laser guns at opponents and running away. When in control of his augmented younger relative players could utilise her extending arm to dispatch far-off foes or grapple hook far-off rooftops in order to jettison her forwards. Just as interesting were levels where Crash helped, humiliated and brawled with Cortex. "The design direction for all of that came



» [PC] An alternative universe version of Crash's girlfriend Tawna is playable in *Crash Bandicoot 4*.

from TT Oxford," Jon acknowledges. "It was a new team that we set up specifically to make *Crash Twinsanity*. They pitched me all of their ideas, and I loved the concepts around playing as and with Neo Cortex. I especially liked and encouraged the uneasy alliance formed between them when they teamed up."

Reviewers commended these ingenious mechanics when they rated *Twinsanity*. However, Traveller's Tales moved onto other franchises after its release in 2004. Numerous *Crash* spin-offs followed, including a remaster of the three original titles called *Crash Bandicoot: N Sane Trilogy*, but it took 16 years for another core title to appear.

With so much time having passed since *Crash Twinsanity*, its successor *Crash Bandicoot 4: It's About Time* was given an array of fresh mechanics. One obvious example being that the power-ups in the follow-up were granted by beings called

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

SUPERB SPIN-OFFS: 2008-2010

MORE CRASH BANDICOOT OUTINGS



CRASH: MIND OVER MUTANT

Although based around missions as opposed to levels, *Mind Over Mutant* has similar combat and collectables to *Crash Of The Titans*. Its new features include character interaction, storing and then summoning defeated Titans, and power-ups such as spin-digging underground.



CRASH BANDICOOT NITRO KART 3D

In most respects, *Crash Bandicoot Nitro Kart 3D* is an iOS *Crash Team Racing*, where you race rivals from the *Crash* games and get weapons by smashing crates. It differs in that you accelerate automatically and steer by tilting your device, both of which work really well.



CRASH BANDICOOT NITRO KART 2

This *Crash Bandicoot Nitro Kart 3D* sequel doesn't mess too much with the formula of its popular predecessor, but it does add a number of new options. These include touchscreen controls as well as tilt steering, eliminator and mission modes, and multiplayer over Wi-Fi.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

SUPERB SPIN-OFFS: 2019-2023

THE MODERN ADVENTURES OF CRASH BANDICOOT

**CRASH TEAM RACING NITRO-FUELED**

If there's a racing equivalent of *N Sane Trilogy* then *Nitro-Fueled* is it. As well as remastering the original *Crash Team Racing* it adds courses and content from *Crash Nitro Kart* and *Crash Tag Team Racing*, with the end result being the ultimate *Crash* racing experience.

**CRASH BANDICOOT: ON THE RUN!**

A *Crash Bandicoot* endless runner seems appropriate given that the level where he's chased by a boulder in the original game was essentially a forerunner of the genre. *On The Run* adds to the format with *Crash* staples such as crate smashing, spin attacks and boss fights.

**CRASH TEAM RUMBLE**

The two teams in *Crash Team Rumble* are tasked with amassing Wumpa Fruit at drop-off points while stopping their rivals from doing the same. Strategy is added by the game's characters being suited to either banking fruit, blocking the opposition or unlocking power-ups.

Quantum Masks, with their gifts allowing Crash to glide through the air, make objects tangible or intangible, slow time and reverse gravity. In a clever twist, these talents only became available when they were particularly useful.

Innovative challenges requiring players to learn new skills also played their part in giving *It's About Time* an up-to-date feel.

One of the most memorable examples of this involved Crash grinding along everything from rusty girders to jungle vines parkour-style.

To keep players on their toes, there were gaps to jump, and obstacles requiring Crash to temporarily hang onto rails instead of grinding on them or even jump onto parallel rails.

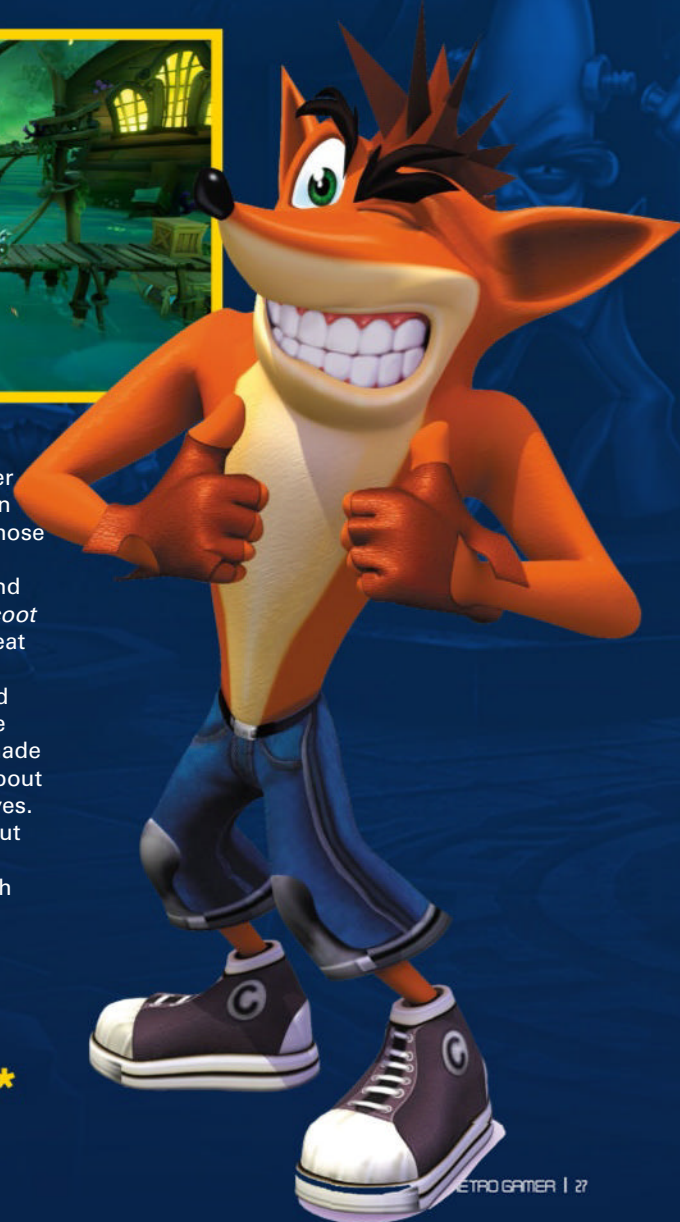
It's About Time also stood out for its playable characters. You played either Crash or Coco in most levels, but in others you controlled *Crash* villains Neo Cortex and Dingodile, and an alternative version of Crash's girlfriend Tawna. Cortex had a ray gun that turned foes into solid or bouncy platforms, Dingodile had a vacuum gun to suck up and fire out enemies and Tawna had a grappling hook that worked like Nina's in *Wrath Of Cortex*.

When *Crash Bandicoot 4: It's About Time* was released in 2020, reviewers responded positively to its new features and the game went on to top sales charts worldwide, much like the trilogy that had introduced

"I LOVED THE CONCEPTS AROUND PLAYING AS AND WITH NEO CORTEX. I ESPECIALLY LIKED AND ENCOURAGED THE UNEASY ALLIANCE FORMED BETWEEN THEM WHEN THEY TEAMED UP"
JON BURTON



Crash Bandicoot in the Nineties had done. Former Naughty Dog creative Dan Arey puts the appeal of those games and its marsupial hero down to narrative and aesthetics. "*Crash Bandicoot* was a whole bunch of great storytelling with some wonderful characters, and it got better and more interesting as the series progressed," Dan beams. "We made characters that you would really care about a lot, and we did that with their narratives. We were trying to make the games about an arc in their stories, where you could watch every cutscene and have as much fun doing that as you did playing the game. The titles were also driven by strong visuals. Jason Rubin was an artist at heart, and he wouldn't take no for an answer if there was a technical limitation. That was why the *Crash Bandicoot* games were so far ahead." ✨



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- Pro 2 wired controller was designed with respect for the classics. We paid extra attention to the most critical characteristics like the d-pad, to make sure it feels exactly like you remember it.

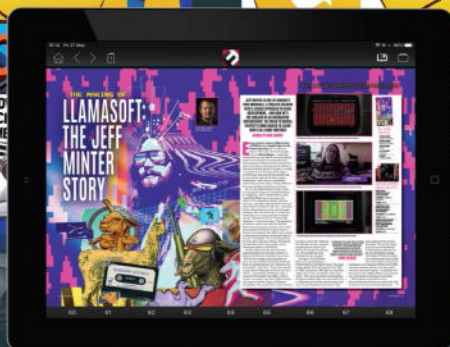
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ESSENTIAL GAME CENTIPEDE

Atari always managed to make great home versions of this frantic arcade shoot-'em-up, and the Atari 5200 version is no exception. The look and sound of the arcade game have been well captured, with the horizontal screen orientation of the home version standing as the only significant difference. Although it's a good game without the Trak-Ball, arguably standing as one of the console's most essential games, the appeal of ditching the rubbish standard joysticks in favour of a more accurate representation of the arcade controls can't be overstated.



Trak-Ball Controller

» PLATFORM: Atari 5200 » YEAR: 1983 » COST: \$79.95 (launch), £80+ (today, boxed), £60+ (today, unboxed)

If your goal is to bring the arcade experience home, a good default joystick will go a long way – unfortunately, the Atari 5200 doesn't have a good default joystick. Still, the range of games you need to cover ensures that you'll eventually need to provide other options for players, and Atari was on the case in this regard. Recognising the importance of trackball controls in some of its existing hits, Atari advertised the Trak-Ball along with the console, though it was rather slow to arrive.

Atari's hardware designers made sure that the Trak-Ball shared the same attributes as the console it was designed for, creating a large, heavy unit. Its size was at least partially down to the desire to cater for both left-handed and right-handed players, resulting in the duplication of both the numerical keypads and fire buttons on either side of the actual trackball. Few games are compatible with the Trak-Ball and fewer still are ideal to play with it, but it does greatly enhance the authenticity of the console's versions of *Missile Command* and *Centipede*. *

PERIPHERAL VISION: TRAK-BALL CONTROLLER



Trak-Ball Controller fact

■ Much like the Atari 5200 features a large storage bay for its controllers, the underside of the Trak-Ball includes a space specifically designed for tidying away the controller's cable.

THE MAKING OF YES, PRIME MINISTER

A WEEK IS A LONG TIME IN POLITICS. POLITICAL CRISES, DRUNKEN MPS AND AGGRESSIVE US AMBASSADORS ARE JUST SOME OF THE OBSTACLES PM JIM HACKER FACES WITHIN FIVE DAYS. SO, SIT DOWN, PAY ATTENTION, AND BE PREPARED TO TREAD A FINE LINE AS RETRO GAMER PEEKS BACK AT THE POLITICALLY CHARGED WORLD OF YES, PRIME MINISTER. HIC!

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:**
MOZAIC
PUBLISHING
- » **DEVELOPER:**
ODE/FIVE WAYS
SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:**
1987
- » **PLATFORM:**
C64, VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:**
STRATEGY/TEXT
ADVENTURE

Created by Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn, the original *Yes, Minister* series ran for three series in the early Eighties. Its

popularity led to a sequel, *Yes, Prime Minister*, in which the original series' lead character, Jim Hacker, is promoted to the head of his (unnamed) party. Replete with satirical barbs on political life, the series is revered today and, sadly, as relevant as ever, "I mean you... lied," chides cabinet secretary Sir Humphrey Appleby to Hacker in one particular episode. "Yes, I know this is a difficult concept to get across to a politician. You... ah yes, you did not tell the truth."

Yes, *Prime Minister* the game thrusts the player into the weighty shoes of Jim Hacker, guiding the PM across a turbulent week in charge of the UK. Hacker's office at the Houses Of Parliament is the gameplay's central point.

From here, he can monitor incoming news, consult his diary, read political memos, study the polls, speak to colleagues, and gaze lovingly at Mrs Hacker's picture. As with the TV show, Sir Humphrey Appleby and Bernard Woolley are on hand to offer political nous/sarcasm to their boss. Throughout the five days, Hacker takes calls, attends meetings and makes decisions that could radically affect his standing in the polls at the end of the week.

Beginning in the early Eighties, Mosaic Publishing drew on founder Vicky Carne's contacts within the book-publishing industry for most of its text-heavy games. Having dabbled with licences of science-fiction works *The Unorthodox Engineers* and *The Width Of The World*, Mosaic hit big in 1985 with Level 9's computerised adaptation of Sue Townsend's best-seller on teenage life, *The Secret Diary Of Adrian Mole Aged 13¾*. By utilising canny financial sense (Mosaic would pay small advances for its licences, followed by a royalty deal), *Adrian Mole* was highly successful, leading Vicky to investigate further deals outside of the literary world. "I was very much a fan of *Yes, Prime Minister*,"



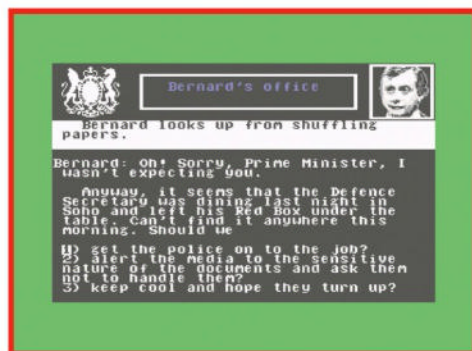
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TITANIC: THE RECOVERY MISSION
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1986

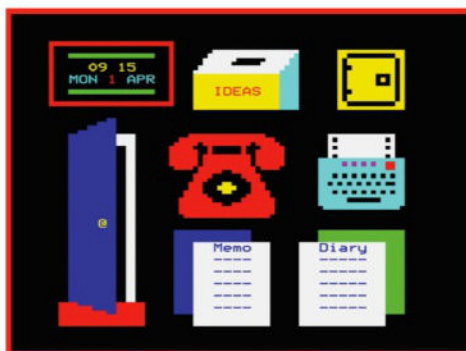
TRIVIAL PURSUIT (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1986

THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1988





» [C64] Dealing with incompetent behaviour within his party is all part of Hacker's remit.



» [BBC Micro] While it may not look so attractive, the BBC Micro's icon display is certainly pragmatic.



» [BBC Micro] Hacker's diary helpfully informs him of when to be late



» Mosaic Publishing's Vicky Carne. Vicky still works in publishing today, producing a range of dog-training content for her company, The Dog Coach.



» Today Rik Yapp still codes, and has just launched a productivity browser for professionals called Kirmada.

she explains, "and after watching one particularly good episode, I had this mad idea." Having previously published games based on books (with the occasional aside such as *The Archers*, based on the radio show), *Yes, Prime Minister* would be Mosaic's first – and only – TV licence. But it needed a developer.

"AFTER WATCHING ONE PARTICULARLY GOOD EPISODE, I HAD THIS MAD IDEA" VICKY CARNE

Vicky approached several companies, including the Ramjam Corporation, with whom Mosaic had collaborated on the Dick Francis adaptation

Twice Shy. The early consensus was that the game should focus on Bernard Woolley, Hacker's loyal private secretary. "Several stories were followed up, but it never quite went anywhere," says Vicky. Exasperated, she approached Oxford Digital Enterprises, or ODE, which had recently increased its reputation with the Domark board-game licence, *Trivial Pursuit*. "I think the 'Oxford' part of Oxford Digital Enterprises was very helpful," notes David Pringle, founder of the Oxford-based developer. "Vicky assumed the game needed some literary input and reckoned it was a good place for that. As it happened, she was right!"

Vicky approached ODE in late-1986, pitching her idea to David and his colleagues. "She'd had quite a bit of success with the *Adrian Mole* game, and there was potentially a big Book Club

Associates deal if she could get the project to market during 1987," continues David. "It didn't take much for us to agree – *Yes, Prime Minister* was massive on TV at the time, and I reckoned an adaptation would be fun."

As ODE's managing director, David's role was to pull the strands together, managing game design, script, production, and programming. Vicky was relatively relaxed thanks to the developer's previous excellent work with Domark. "We discussed how the game would work, but largely, I left it up to them," she recalls. "They were very good at what they did, which is why I commissioned them in the first place." David Pringle assembled his team, most of whom had worked on *Trivial Pursuit*: Rik Yapp, Richard Horrocks and John Wood. Explains David, "There were clearly two major aspects that needed pulling together: coding the game structure and writing the scenarios." The former was straightforward as ODE's experienced coders merged *Adrian Mole*'s tree structure with their graphical work on *Trivial Pursuit*.

Writing the scenarios was the tricky part. "Getting scripts together for amusing scenarios was the real issue," says David. "Somehow, we had to emulate the most successful political comedy series of the decade." Fortunately, David's girlfriend, Jenny Coles, came to the rescue, as he explains. "[Jenny] was doing a doctorate in history and knew lots of literary people in the humanities. Through her contacts, we found an amazingly amusing Irishman, Dermot Quinn, who'd just finished his doctorate in history and also happened to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of British political history."

For Dermot, *Yes, Prime Minister* would be his only brush with videogames and the beginning of a friendship with David and Jenny that continues today. "I thought it was a great idea – but also a challenging one," he tells us. "The writing had to be tight, the plots plausible, the characters well-drawn and the jokes



» Mosaic secured Gerald Scarfe's singular artwork for *Yes, Prime Minister*'s promotional campaign.



» Dermot Quinn, erstwhile scriptwriter for *Yes, Prime Minister* the game, and today, professor of history at Seton Hall University in New Jersey, USA.



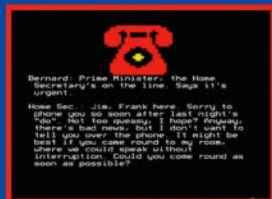
» After leaving the games industry in 2006, David Pringle put his Oxford degree to more relevant use in a career using theoretical physics to solve problems in audio for the music industry.



» [ZX Spectrum] Scandal is never far away in Hacker's government, but how do you deal with it?

CONVERSION CAPERS

RETRO GAMER'S GUIDE TO ALL FIVE VERSIONS OF YES, PRIME MINISTER



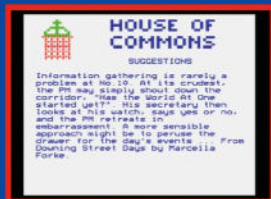
AMSTRAD CPC

■ There's a suitably blue hue to the Amstrad's loading screen, and this version plays well, scrolling neatly and displaying Dermot Quinn's witticisms in a crisp and clear style. As with the other versions, question marks remain over long-term play, but the branching decisions and open-ended style are well-presented.



COMMODORE 64

■ For shoot-'em-up-obsessed C64 owners, the Mosaic game no doubt offers a vastly less than visceral thrill. Nevertheless, *Yes, Prime Minister*'s smoothly scrolling display (including an appropriate auburn office for Hacker) and branching gameplay make it one of the computer's more distinctive offerings.



BBC MICRO

■ The BBC version of *Yes, Prime Minister* is (ironically) the most diverse, eschewing the twee scenery of Hacker's office for a simple set of icons set against a stark black background. Otherwise, the game works in much the same way despite the limited and blockier display.



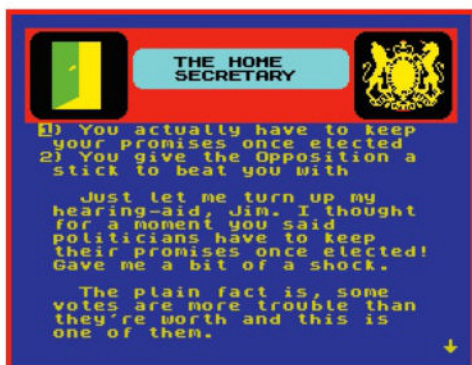
ZX SPECTRUM

■ Unlike the C64, Amstrad and PC versions, the Spectrum game lacks a scrolling view. However, given the limited interaction of the game in general, it's actually better having everything wedged into one screen, saving a lot of pointless meandering with the cursor. It has a dreaded multiloader, though.

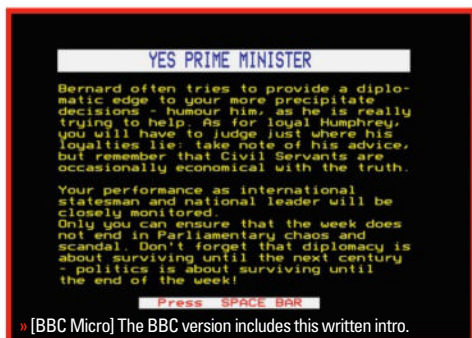


PC

■ Coder John Wood helped port *Yes, Prime Minister* to the PC a year later. Like the Amstrad and C64, there's a scrolling display, presented in glaring green and brown, while the text segments appear in a severe black and white tone. Some ugly visual tearing doesn't help, but all the humorous wordplay is as on the nose as ever.



» [ZX Spectrum] More sharp humour from Dermot Quinn.



» [BBC Micro] The BBC version includes this written intro.

► good." With his background in history and interest in politics, the script for *Yes, Prime Minister* was a perfect fit for Dermot. But the show was hugely popular, as were the best-selling books based on it. "I suppose I have a pretty good knowledge of British politics and also like to think I have a good sense of humour," he notes modestly. "I didn't really do any research – I just sat down and made up some stories. So research is a grand term for allowing the imagination to do its work."

With ODE on board, Vicky Carne completed the licence acquisition, also securing a deal with The Home Computer Club (an offshoot of Book Club Associates, BCA) to promote it as a *Game Of The Month* title. "Vicky was a steady presence in Oxford,

nervously wondering how we were progressing," remembers David. "Her big fear was meeting the date of launch to ensure that the big deal with the BCA didn't fall through." And, of course, built into the deal were multiple approvals, not least from the show's writers and the BBC. "Luckily, Vicky really enjoyed Dermot's scripts, so I think that gave her a degree of confidence."

David recalls that the approval process was inevitably stressful. "The scripts needed to be approved by Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn. Antony was a slightly severe-looking but really gentle chap, obviously bright, but it took him a bit of time to get over the concept of controlling a game using a keyboard and mouse." Then came the acid test as the writer studied Dermot Quinn's script. "There was

"I DIDN'T REALLY DO ANY RESEARCH – I JUST SAT DOWN AND MADE UP SOME STORIES" DERMOT QUINN



a long pause," recalls David, "and finally a laugh as he read one of Dermot's jokes. He seemed delighted and, in the end, said that one of them was so good, he was considering using it in a future series." The first hurdle was passed – now on to the BBC and its head of light entertainment, James Moir. After a

brief and awkward meeting in which David demonstrated the Commodore 64 version of *Yes, Prime Minister*, approval was granted. Further permissions from the show's cast (for its digitised pictures) and Gerald Scarfe, for the use of some of his inimitable art in the game's

adverts, put a further strain on Vicky.

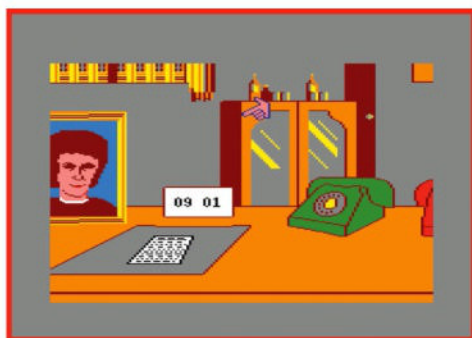
Produced under tight time constraints to meet the BCA deadline, David admits that *Yes, Prime Minister* is not perfect. "We all loved the content but knew the presentation could maybe have been a bit spicier. But then it was engineered to get released on a tight timescale, so all in all, we were happy." With its innovative mouse control and a branching storyline that unfolds slowly over the week, there is plenty of immersion for gamers looking for something different from arcade conversions and platform



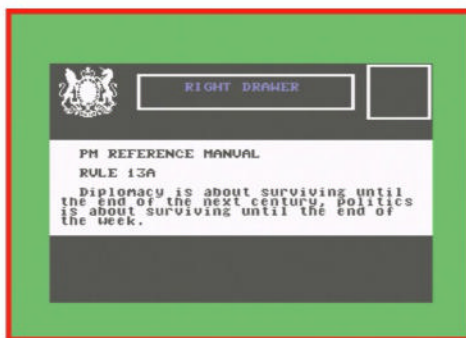
» [Amstrad CPC] One of Bernard Woolley's many memos.



» [ZX Spectrum] What will the first day bring?



» [Amstrad CPC] Nine o'clock and the phones are silent – surely it won't stay like that for long?



» [C64] Hacker's right drawer often contains useful (and not-so-useful) tips.

games. Additionally, with Mosaic hardly the most prolific of publishers, it could afford to devote much attention to the physical side of the final product. "Vicky was great to work with," smiles David. "She came up with a wonderful package for the game, based on a red ministerial box with the most brilliant gold highlights."

"THERE WAS A LONG PAUSE AND FINALLY A LAUGH AS [ANTONY JAY] READ ONE OF DERMOT'S JOKES"
DAVID PRINGLE

of a computer game – pretty understandable for 1987, I suppose!"

Mosaic's *Yes, Prime Minister* perfectly captures the themes and humour of the expertly written and performed TV series. "I

was and remain a great fan of the show," says a wistful Dermot Quinn. "The scripts are consistently superb, clever, well-observed, sharp and true." Dermot's appreciation of how *Yes, Prime Minister* works – its blend of situational and character-driven humour – was critical. The game depended on its script, giving the player clever and humorous scenarios before demonstrating the implications of their decisions. "And I like to think we got that right," says Dermot.

Sadly, *Yes, Prime Minister* proved to be a valedictory release for Vicky and her unique software house. "It was never a large corporation, and I just decided to stop, had a baby and moved out of London," she says. "But it was great fun, and I look back at those times very fondly." And how many games companies can say they put the player into number ten Downing Street, giving them an acerbic insight into the inner machinations of the British government? "We will be honest," replies Hacker to Sir Humphrey as he bids to make up for his earlier slip to the House. "Honesty always gives you the advantage of surprise in the House of Commons." Well, indeed. *

Our thanks to Vicky Carne, David Pringle and Dermot Quinn for their time.

The game's high price – £14.95 – seemingly didn't deter interested fans, and the BCA promotion further boosted income. "Play-wise, I thought it was excellent by the standards of the time and what was possible," notes Vicky. "And Dermot's scripts were very clever." Many of Dermot's tongue-in-cheek jibes, like the TV show, reflect real-world events of the time, although his idea concerning nuclear warfare was abandoned as slightly *too* crazed.

The final promotional flourish for *Yes, Prime Minister* was its ingenious launch party, the brainchild of Vicky Carne. "It was at the QEII Conference Centre, opposite Westminster Abbey, so a number of MPs could come along," she says. Several MPs attended the event, including Patrick McNair-Wilson (MP for New Forest), Sir Geoffrey Johnson-Smith (Wealden) and John Butcher, the parliamentary under-secretary of state for trade and industry. "Vicky did us proud," grins David. "Although most of the MPs were tech luddites and had some difficulty understanding the concept

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

RIK YAPP RECALLS AN AMUSING MOMENT FROM THE PRESS LAUNCH

■ "I remember going to the game launch overlooking the Houses Of Parliament to show the game off to MPs, and the BBC News was there. I was demonstrating the game to one of the MPs (I can't remember his name – honest!), and he was trying to get the hang of using the mouse – he had never used one before. He was trying to move the pointer down and got to the edge of the desk and, in a panicky voice, asked, 'What do I do now?' I told him to pick the mouse up and then move it towards him again. So he raised the mouse 12 inches off the desk and then tried moving it in the air! Well, it made me laugh anyway!"



» [C64] Hacker has a splendid view of The Houses Of Parliament.



Double Dragon II: The Revenge

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT

» RETROREVIVAL



» ARCADE » 1988 » TECHNOS JAPAN

When you make a game as phenomenally successful as *Double Dragon* the prospect of a sequel must always be a daunting one. Do you

drastically overhaul your original game, or simply tweak its existing mechanics? Do you take your sequel in a bold new direction aesthetically, or do you just upgrade your existing engine? Technos Japan largely decided to stick rigidly to the concepts that made its first game such a success, but it did make one significant change and it was one I could never get on with when I first encountered the game.

Double Dragon II was graphically very similar to its predecessor, but its speed was generally improved (although it still suffered from slowdown) and it visually looked that little bit slicker as well. It was instantly recognisable as a *Double Dragon* game and I quickly honed in on it when I saw it at Quay Amusements. After quickly feeding the machine my pocket money, I had two shocks in quick succession – the first was seeing Marian being ruthlessly gunned down in the game's opening sequence, the second was *Double Dragon II*'s new control system.

Rather than stick with the trusty configuration that had been used for the first game, the sequel took a leaf out of *Renegade*'s books and gave you a front attack button and a rear attack button – and I couldn't get on with it at all. I constantly found myself throwing attacks in the wrong direction and lost all my credits before I could get to the end of the first stage. I'd played the original game so much that its controls were seared into my brain and I just couldn't wrap my head around the new system.

The weird thing though is that I had no issues with the controls when they were in *Renegade* but I just couldn't get on with them here. Even today I'm still terrible at *Double Dragon II* and once again struggled through its first stage. You don't even want to know how many credits I used to take this screenshot, but it was a lot. *



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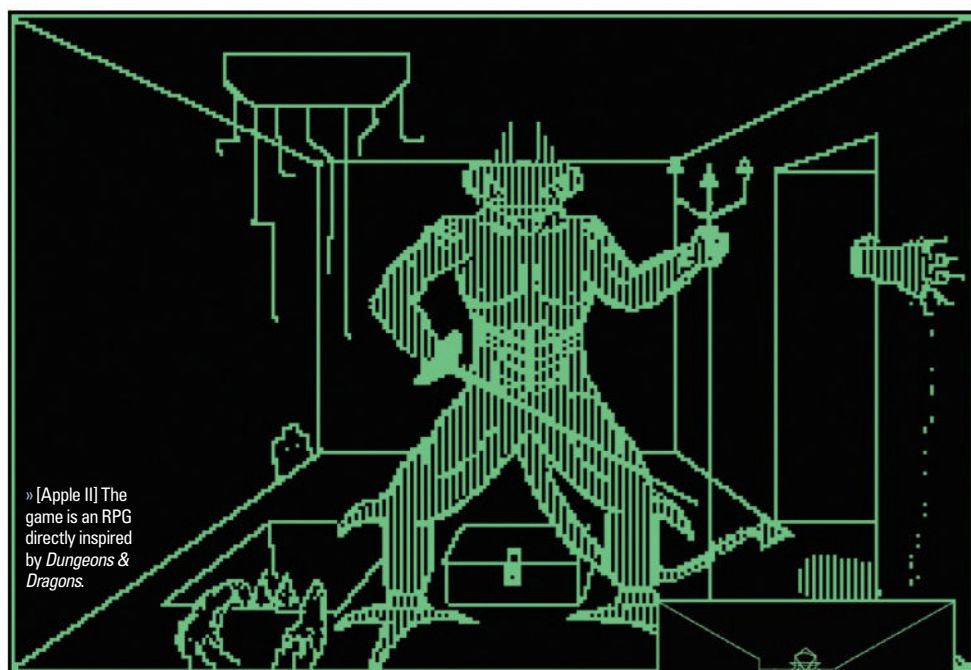
SO YOU
WANT TO
COLLECT...



APPLE II GAMES

Unsurprisingly given it sold about six million units during its lifetime, many of gaming's most iconic titles were developed on the Apple II series of computers. But where should collectors start? We take a look at some of the more notable releases

Words by David Crookes



» [Apple II] The game is an RPG directly inspired by *Dungeons & Dragons*.

DELVING DEEP

AKALABETH: WORLD OF DOOM

EXPECT TO PAY
£500+
USA

DEVELOPER:
RELEASE:

RICHARD GARRIOTT
1979

Written entirely in Applesoft BASIC, Richard Garriott's first commercially published game is nothing short of legendary. Despite being simplistic in looks thanks to its use of low-resolution wireframe graphics, the game set the tone for future RPGs and it's rightly considered as one of the most important games ever made.

Created by Garriott (aka Lord British) while he was still at school, the game was originally self-published with just 12 copies sold in a computer store in Texas. Packaging took the form of resealable storage bags into which a photocopied

cover and instructions were inserted. Yet it's highly unlikely that you will come across this particular version and, if you did, expect to pay huge sums (in 2013, one went for £5,000).

You'll have more luck pursuing the commercial version released in 1980 by California Pacific Computer Company although there are relatively few copies around, despite suggested sales of 30,000. There are different covers, too, but you're not really going to be in a position to choose. Oh, and watch out for fakes!



BEST OF BRITISH

More games to collect from Richard Garriott's Apple II days

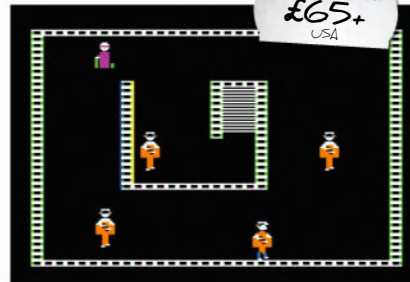
Richard Garriott went on to develop the *Ultima* series, continuing with (and building upon) *Akalabeth's* dungeons, monsters, quests and themes. To that end, it made for a rather familiar follow-up franchise which is why *Akalabeth* is often referred to as *Ultima 0*. Since the Apple II was blessed with the first five *Ultima* games, you may want to grab the lot as a mini-collection.

If you do, prise open your wallet. The original release of *Ultima I* from 1981, came in a plastic folder with a manual and reference card, yet we could only find a standalone floppy disk selling for £96 in the US and £178 in Canada. Meanwhile, a complete *Ultima II* can sell for upwards of £809 (try to get one with a map), *Ultima III* can reach £310, *Ultima IV* can hit £275, while *Ultima V* attracts bids of £60 or so. Look out for remakes (such as 1986's *Ultima I*) and compilations.





» [APPLE II] *Castle Wolfenstein* was played from a top-down perspective but the characters were side on.



» [APPLE II] The aim of the game is to prevent yourself from being caught by the Nazis.

SNEAKING AROUND

CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

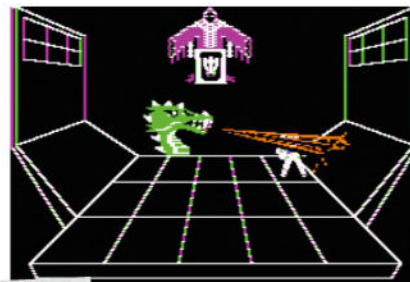
DEVELOPER: MUSE SOFTWARE
RELEASE: 1981

■ Not only did *Castle Wolfenstein* spawn a best-selling series of Second World War games, its combination of stealth and immersive action also led to the creation of *Doom*. Developed on the Apple II by Silas Warner, *Castle Wolfenstein* boasted procedurally generated gameplay spread over 60 screens and tasked players with escaping from the clutches of Nazis and grabbing Germany's war plans. With limited firepower and challenging guards, the trick was to move around the castle without being spotted. It proved both tense and innovative.

Grabbing a copy of the original bagged version with an orange cover will set you back around £400. For that, you'll get a manual, disk and, if you're lucky, a product registration card. You can also seek out later releases: one has a purple cover and there were re-released boxed versions with art by John Benson. Two bagged licensed releases by Main Street Publishing are interesting. The earliest has the words Muse Software on the front (to Muse's annoyance, leading to their removal) and it's the rarest of the two, costing around £65.



» [APPLE II] As the story unfolds, you find yourself navigating a maze and avoiding drones.



» [APPLE II] The enemy confronts you in the image of a priest "eyes flaming with malevolence" – then a dragon emerges!

WINGING IT

WINGS OUT OF SHADOW

DEVELOPER: FRED SABERHAGEN
RELEASE: 1982

■ Fred Saberhagen was not a videogame developer. He was an American sci-fi and fantasy writer who was best known for *Berserker* – a series of short stories and novels. One of those stories was *Wings Out Of Shadow* which appeared in *If* magazine in 1974. It ended up being adapted as an exclusive game for the Apple II, with Saberhagen penning the in-game text, making it something of an interesting curiosity (the short story was included in the manual for good measure). Copies of the game don't appear all that often but when they do, you can expect to pay about £90 for the original United States release. For that price, you should be getting the boxed game with a disk and hardback manual.



FLICKER FREE

GORGON

DEVELOPER: SIRIUS SOFTWARE
RELEASE: 1981

■ Nasir Gebelli was a celebrated Apple II programmer and the Iranian-American knocked out games at a rate of knots, creating a whopping 12 titles for Sirius Software in his first year alone. Horizontally scrolling shooter *Gorgon* was among his biggest hits, selling 23,000 copies in 12 months according to figures printed in *Computer Gaming World* magazine. It was rightly hailed as one of the finest *Defender* clones and Gebelli would be acclaimed for his ability to create non-flickery, faster animations than his rivals. You can buy *Gorgon* today for upwards of £60 on import from the US and that should include the sleeve, manual, disk and original bag. Loose disks are relatively inexpensive.



» [APPLE II] Boasting graphics created in the E-Z Draw package, *Gorgon* requires you to fire at the enemies and try and save the civilians.



» [APPLE II] If you fail to act in time, the aliens will appear and whisk the civilians away. Do everything you can to stop this from happening.

GEBELLI'S GREATS!

The Apple II programmer went on to co-create *Final Fantasy* but not before coding these

Horizon V

■ Gebelli didn't stick around at Sirius Software even though he had helped it to become one of the largest videogame publishers. Instead, he went alone, setting up Gebelli Software, kickstarting his venture with the Apple II exclusive *Horizon V* which was an early FPS set in space. Sadly, the game didn't sell particularly well so that likely accounts for why you'd be paying upwards of £185 for a packaged copy of the game today.



Zenith

■ Very similar to *Horizon V*, this space shooter tasked players with defending a city from attacking aliens. This one allowed the player's ship to be rotated and it was well-received by critics – you needed an earlier Apple (II, II+ or IIe) for it to work, though. A good quality copy of this game in a near-perfect envelope complete with a poster and the game on disk will set you back at least £150.



Multiple media

■ Games for the Apple II were initially only released on cassettes but they were soon distributed on 3.5-inch and 5.25-inch floppies too.

Which computer?

■ If you're looking to invest in an Apple II, the Mac-like Apple IIGS is the most flexible option, running pretty much every game.

Box clever

■ Although owning the short-run early releases of games is a dream for many collectors, later boxed or remake versions will be easier to track.

Narrow down

■ Hundreds of games were released for the Apple II so you may want to concentrate on specific publishers such as EA, Infocom, Origin, Interplay or Brøderbund.

SPARE TIME

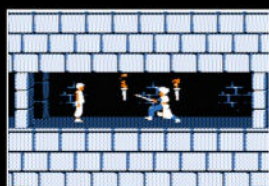
PRINCE OF PERSIA

EXPECT TO PAY
£310+
USA

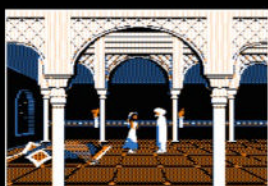
EXPECT TO PAY
£220+
EUROPE

DEVELOPER: BRØDERBUND
RELEASE: 1989

■ Side-scrolling platform puzzler *Prince Of Persia* is famed for its amazing rotoscope animation and sword-swishing gameplay. The product of one developer – Jordan Mechner – who spent three years creating the game, *Prince Of Persia* was initially released on the Apple II before being ported to pretty much every contemporary platform under the sun. The boxed release was published by Brøderbund and it comes with a user's guide and disk. Frustratingly tracking down copies on the likes of eBay isn't easy, despite healthy sales. While we found a lone floppy disk for £11, locating a full copy proved as difficult as completing *Prince Of Persia* against the clock. You're better off contacting private Apple groups or locating the original 6502 source code (for free) is far easier, though bit.ly/princesource



» [APPLE II] Don't forget to grab your sword or you'll certainly come a cropper in Mechner's game.



» [APPLE II] *Prince Of Persia* starts with a cinematic intro, introducing the game's concept of time.

BEAT THIS!

Another princess needed rescuing in the precursor to *Prince Of Persia*



■ Before Jordan Mechner created *Prince Of Persia*, he developed *Karateka* on an Apple II while studying at Yale University. It was his first time experimenting with rotoscoping and the result, when combined with a compelling storyline and a good number of foes, was a revolutionary, smooth-scrolling, cinematic platform martial arts beat-'em-up. As such, it was no surprise to see *Karateka* become a number-one seller and a game that all Apple II collectors (and fans) really ought to possess. That said, copies today don't come cheap. The big-box game will set you back at least £90 (and about a third of that if you just want the disk). Even so, it's worth it if only to have a laugh trying out the Apple II Easter egg that appears when you try inserting side two of the floppy. Spoiler alert: the game loads upside down!

MURDER SHE WROTE

MYSTERY HOUSE

EXPECT TO PAY
£200+
USA

DEVELOPER:
RELEASE:

ON-LINE SYSTEMS
1980



■ Considered to be the first graphic adventure, *Mystery House* was written by Roberta Williams and it was developed with the assistance of her husband, Ken. Initially created as a hobby, this tense masterpiece was published by the couple's company, On-Line Systems and, to their great surprise, it went on to sell a staggering 80,000 copies. Players were enthralled by the horror story that unfolded within the game's Victorian mansion and the nods to Agatha Christie's novel *And Then There Were None* were plain to see. Trouble is, it's murder to get hold of one of the original copies and the best price we've seen (for the game without the resealable bag and instructions) is £200 from the US.



» [APPLE II] Roberta Williams' game perfectly sets the scene: you're about to enter a spooky old house!



» [APPLE II] And in you go, navigating using text commands in the traditional text adventure style.

DEAD GOOD

TIME ZONE

EXPECT TO PAY
£310+
USA

DEVELOPER:
RELEASE:

ON-LINE SYSTEMS
1982



■ Having created *Mystery House*, On-Line Systems developed many more adventures including *Mission Asteroid*, *The Wizard And The Princess*, *Cranston Manor* and *Ulysses And The Golden Fleece*. They were published under the name *Hi-Res Adventure* and, thanks to their use of the same engine, could be developed relatively quickly. Then along came *Time Zone*. This game was hugely ambitious, taking 14 months to make and employing a large team to do so. By the time it was released, the title spanned six double-sided floppy disks. It also cost \$99 dollars to buy which not only made it the most expensive game at the time but also accounted for relatively poor sales. Little wonder sellers want big bucks for this one. You're generally looking at upwards of £310 for a boxed copy although some people tend to ask for considerably more. We've also seen a factory-sealed copy up for sale for £3,000.



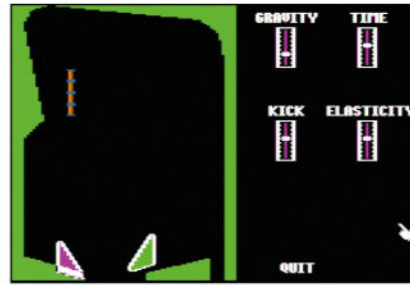
» [APPLE II] *Time Zone* was made up of 1,500 screens and the graphics were created in the computer's hi-res mode.



» [APPLE II] Although you can see what's happening, the text descriptions help bring the scenarios to life.



» [APPLE II] Creating pinball tables is as easy as dragging pieces to the main area and letting go.



» [APPLE II] There are also more options down the right-hand side allowing you to create a perfect game.

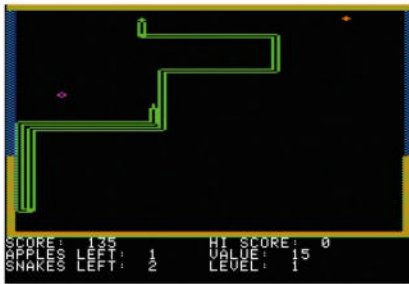
FLIPPING GREAT

PINBALL CONSTRUCTION SET

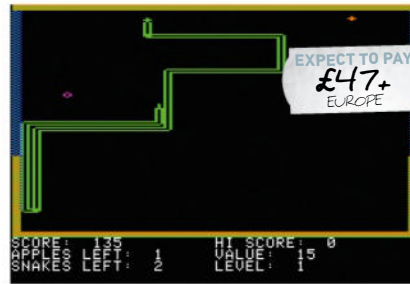
DEVELOPER:
RELEASE:

BUDGECO
1982

■ Bill Budge is another legendary developer who cut his teeth on the Apple II. Having created *Raster Blaster*, he went on to code *Pinball Construction Set* and, while this was originally sold via his own company, BudgeCo, it ended up being published by Electronic Arts the following year – becoming one of EA's very first releases. It was, as EA founder Trip Hawkins has said himself, a revolutionary tool, giving gamers the ability to create their own playable pinball tables. Indeed, with more than 300,000 copies sold (including the Atari, C64 and PC ports), it birthed the user-generated content concept, paving the way for more construction sets over the years. So what price can you expect to pay for this ingenious, intuitive, clever program? Well that depends on the version. The EA version can be imported for about £45. The BudgeCo one, however, with its beautiful image of the pinball components in a tray will cost around £185.



» [APPLE II] Gobble up ten apples and you'll be able to make progress through each of the levels.



» [APPLE II] It's a familiar concept which millions were later introduced to via Nokia mobile phones.

MAKING HISS-TORY

SNAKE BYTE

DEVELOPER:
RELEASE:

CHUCK SOMMERVILLE
1982

■ Chuck Sommerville has created many great games including *California Games* and *Chip's Challenge*. His first title, however, was created for the Apple II while he was a student at Georgia Tech and while it was not hugely original, being a derivative of the *Snake* subgenre, it was nevertheless an accomplished game which showcased a strong emerging talent. Originally knocked up in 30 minutes in BASIC then polished significantly before being published by Sirius Software, *Snake Byte* is a fun slice of Apple II history. And the good news is that you can also pick it up at a fairly reasonable price. Get a copy in the original resealable bag and you'll be looking at upwards of £45. We've seen a 'dealer demo' selling for three-times that sum, though.

LIFT OFF!

CHOPLIFTER!

DEVELOPER: DAN GORLIN
RELEASE: 1982

■ *Choplifter* is a game which has inspired countless developers, among them Jordan Mechner. Initially developed by Dan Gorlin as a way of seeing if he could animate a helicopter, the project evolved and eventually clicked into place when rescuable hostages were added. It felt a tad political at the time since it was coming off the back of the Iran hostage crisis but that was never Gorlin's intention. Rather, he was simply focussed on the gameplay and upping the ante by making the game feel cinematic. Expect the boxed version of *Choplifter* to cost you at least £90 imported, complete with instructions and floppy disk. You'll find the plastic bag release in great condition available from £20.



» [APPLE II] A neighbourhood fan of *Defender* suggested Dan Gorlin add people to rescue to the game.

BRILL BRØDERBUND!

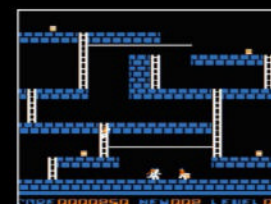
The publisher took a big bite of Apple II's market

Lode Runner

■ Brøderbund published *Choplifter* and, the following year, it took on Doug Smith's *Lode Runner* too. Players needed to seriously engage their brain as they worked through the game's 150 levels collecting gold and avoiding guards. They could then dabble with the amazing level editor. You'll have to pay around £65 to bag this one.

Where In The World Is Carmen Sandiego?

■ Developed in-house, this edutainment title was designed to encourage children to learn more about different countries. It required kids to uncover clues and solve puzzles in a bid to work out the location of a thief. Proving to be a huge critical hit for Brøderbund, it even became a TV game show. Expect to pay up to £25.

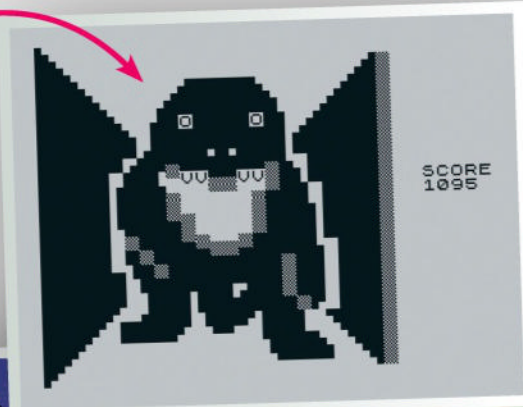


GAMES FEATURING

Also known as retro birds, dinosaurs have been munching their way through videogames for decades. Join us as we highlight some of the best games featuring these gargantuan beasts. And before you ask, we won't be covering any Jurassic Park games, that just feels like cheating

3D MONSTER MAZE

■ Malcolm Evans' ZX81 hit had you navigating a tricky maze in the hope that you'd find the exit before you were discovered by its resident Tyrannosaurus (affectionately called Rex). Despite featuring no sound, cleverly crafted visuals and on-screen messages ramp up the tension to frantic levels, meaning you'll want to make your way through Rex's domain as quickly as possible. Look out! He's behind you!



UGH!

■ Yes it makes the cardinal sin of popularising the myth that men and dinosaurs were fighting over the same meals, but *Ugh!* remains a lot of fun. Your aim is to guide Ugh across the treacherous landscape so you can steal Pterry The Pterodactyl's delicious eggs. While you've got a spear to fight off Pterry and his dino mates, you'll find navigating the diagonal paths just as tough as the actual dinosaurs.



PREHISTORIC ISLE IN 1930

■ SNK's slick shmup not only features one of the most interesting power-up systems of its time, but is also loaded with terrifying dinosaurs to battle. While we'd question their ability to fling out fireballs, whirlwinds and other projectiles, there's no denying they make for challenging foes. Special mention to the huge bosses that are introduced with bulletin-styled messages that show their names, weight and length.



MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND

■ He might be the most inaccurate-looking Triceratops to ever walk the Earth, but you've got to admire Mayhem's tenacity. He not only survived the asteroid that killed off all his plant-loving mates, but also reached the end of the 8-bit era as well, starring in one of the last genuinely amazing C64 games. He might be yellow, but there's certainly nothing cowardly about Mayhem.

DINOSAURS

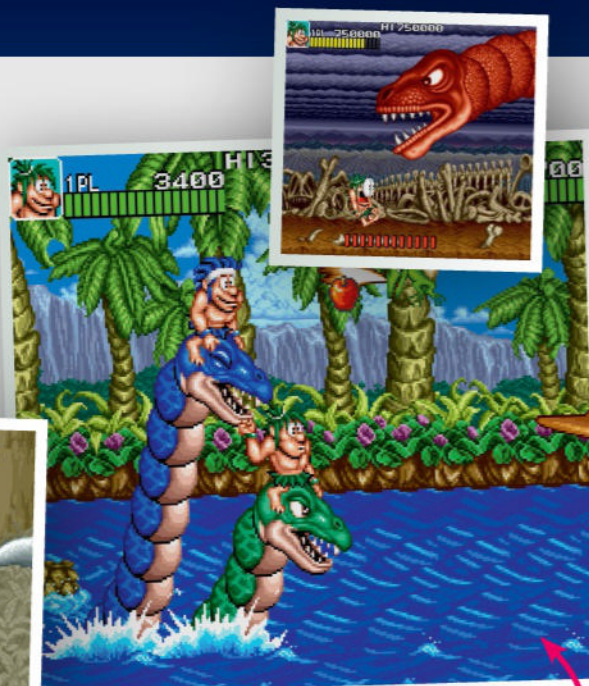
STRIDER

■ We know that all sorts of creatures remain undiscovered in the Amazon, but dinosaurs feel like a stretch too far. Nevertheless, Strider encounters plenty of the ancient beasts as he strides through the scenic jungle, taking out Triceratops and Pterosaurs with aplomb and even riding on the backs of Brontosauruses. If you hadn't already guessed who wrote this article, you probably know now.



JOE & MAC: CAVEMAN NINJA

■ Data East's larger-than-life arcade romp has some of the most dangerous herbivores you're ever likely to encounter in a videogame. They're as vicious as the game's carnivores and aren't afraid to send you back to the Stone Age. And yes, we're well aware that dinosaurs existed long before the Stone Age came along, but if Data East can make stuff up then we can as well.



CADILLACS AND DINOSAURS

■ Based on the cult comic, this is a riotous side-scrolling brawler that's packed with huge dinos to duff up. Interestingly, the scaly beasts won't attack you until they're riled up by poachers, so you'll need to give them a good beating to send them on their way. Thankfully you've got an outrageous arsenal of weapons, so it won't be too long before those dinos are as dead as dodos.



KILLER INSTINCT

■ Dinosaurs have popped up in numerous one-on-one fighters, either as combatants or as part of the background. *Primal Rage*'s Jurassic fisticuffs was considered, as was Jann Lee's kicking a T-rex in the head from *Dead Or Alive 4*, but we've gone with Rare's boisterous arcade hit. Why? Because Riptor is cool as hell and has some truly vicious finishing combos.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

BUGGY BOY

WITH AN OVERSIZED CAB AND 3D SPRITE TECH THAT PREDATED SEGA'S SUPER SCALER GAMES, BUGGY BOY WAS AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT IN ARCADES – IF YOU COULD FIND ONE THAT IS. JOIN US AS WE TRACK DOWN TATSUMI'S THREE-SCREEN MONSTER

WORDS BY
MARTYN CARROLL

Poor Tatsumi. In *TX-1* (1983) and *Buggy Boy* (1985), the Japanese developer created two of the most advanced arcade racing games of the era, yet outside of its homeland, few will be familiar with the name. *TX-1* was manufactured in the West by Atari, under licence from Namco, while *Buggy Boy* was distributed by Taito in Europe and Data East in North America (where it was renamed *Speed Buggy*). All these big arcade names put Tatsumi firmly in the shade – and to compound matters, when *Buggy Boy* is mentioned these days, many gamers are likely to think of Elite Systems, the UK developer which successfully converted the game to home computers in the late Eighties.

Buggy Boy debuted in arcades in July 1985 and it was hard to miss. Like *TX-1*, released 18 months prior, the original sit-down cab featured a steering wheel, stick shift, floor pedals and three monitors that were horizontally aligned to mimic the vehicle's windscreen. The cab also offered 'quadraphonic sound' (translation: four speakers – two up front, two at the rear) that added to the impression of being behind the wheel, racing along to the sounds of revs, bumps and squeals. *Buggy Boy* was a hulking 700lb monster with a 1.5x2m footprint and it was this scale that caught the attention of *CVG* magazine. "*Buggy Boy* is a Goliath amongst arcade machines," reported an unnamed correspondent in the February 1986 issue. "It's larger than *TX-1* with three screens giving a massive panoramic view of your thrilling ride. ▶





» [Arcade] Tatsumi's *TX-1* was marketed by Namco and Atari as the successor to the *Pole Position* games.



» [Arcade] The three monitors afford *Buggy Boy* players a 'super widescreen' display.



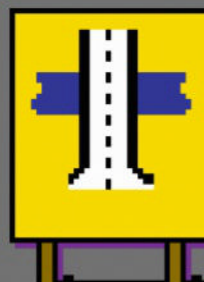
» [Arcade] Before *Out Run*, *Buggy Boy* players were already tearing it up along coastal roads.



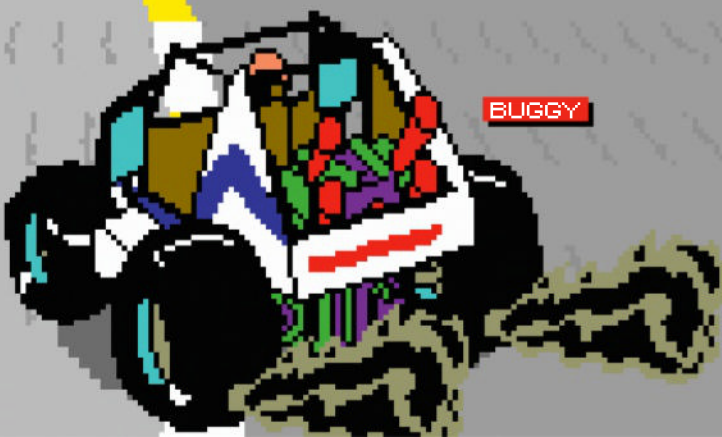
SLIP SIGN



ROCK



BRIDGE 1 SIGN



BUGGY



GATE 2

CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW THE HOME VERSIONS LINED UP ON THE STARTING GRID

COMMODORE 64

■ This is quite a different game compared to the arcade version. The graphics are smaller and the racing is pacier, but the changes work and it's an absolute blast to play. Despite the differences, it's the only conversion to feature rival racers. It deserves its *Zzap!64* Gold Medal.



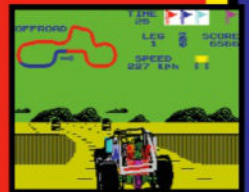
AMSTRAD CPC

■ Visually this is similar to the C64 version, but it's not as fast or as responsive, and the 3D effect is a bit wonky. Most of the coin-op's features make it across, including footballs, embankments and the ability to whiz around on two wheels. Overall it's not too bad.



ZX SPECTRUM

■ Featuring one of the biggest main sprites of any Speccy game, this deserves full marks for ambition. But it's a mess. Other elements are similarly large but simply rendered, and they clog up the screen and slow things down. Unlike other versions, the road does undulate.



ATARI ST

■ This is a solid conversion. The coin-op's graphics have been reproduced at a more manageable size, allowing the game to maintain a decent framerate, and the five courses are all true to the original. It's just a shame the competitors aren't there to add extra challenge.



AMIGA

■ As evidenced by the screenshots, this is visually identical to the ST version, of which it's a direct port. However, in motion it's not quite as smooth, and the sound effects have been changed to be more realistic, but as a result they're not as faithful as on the ST.



TRACK MASTER

A WHISTLE-STOP TOUR OF THE GAME'S FIVE COURSES

OFFROAD

■ Unlike the other routes, this is a circular course consisting of five laps. It's basically for beginners, as it provides a gentle introduction to the main obstacles you'll encounter. Be aware however that additional rocks and walls are added on subsequent laps.



NORTH

■ Taking place in Southern France, and emulating the Monte Carlo Rally, this is mostly a snow-covered course (we guess those are the Alps in the background). This is a challenging drive, especially towards the end of the route which features dual bridges and fallen trees.



EAST

■ This is the Safari route, based in East Africa and skirting both Mount Kenya and Mount Kilimanjaro. The course winds through the desert for the most part and is one of the easier routes, although the legs are long so you'll need to hit as many Time Gates as possible.



WEST

■ Dubbed the Paris-Dakar, this route takes place in West Africa and certainly delivers the thrills and spills associated with the famous rally. This battles it out with North as the toughest challenge, with its snaking route and nasty bridges conspiring to ruin you.



SOUTH

■ The South route, or Southern Cross as the game calls it, actually runs along the east continental coastline of Australia. The distinctive opening leg, featuring open water on the right, sets a serene scene but later legs feature an excess of rocks, walls and gates.



» [Arcade] *Buggy Boy Junior* compromises by squeezing all of the game data (the map, your score etc) at the top of the screen.

► The sit-down cabinet certainly beats an upright and makes you feel you're getting your money's worth. Climb in and prepare for the ride of your life."

Count yourself lucky if you did get to play the game in its original form because it wasn't a particularly common sight back then. Not only was it large, taking up a good chunk of arcade floor space, but it was also expensive to acquire. We're not privy to the exact cost, but we do know from peeking at Atari's books that the very similar TX-1 was priced at \$5,499 in 1984. At the time, this was the most expensive cab Atari had sold by some margin – for context, its earlier sit-down cabs like *Star Wars* and *Pole Position II* sold for \$3,095 – and it wouldn't be eclipsed until 1989 and the arrival of *Hard Drivin'*. We imagine



» [Arcade] Each Time Gate adds a couple of precious seconds to the clock. On some legs you need to hit every one.

that *Buggy Boy* was priced similarly to TX-1, so it would have been a considerable investment for arcade operators.

In its favour, the game truly lived up to its impressive exterior. It was a conventional racer in that it featured rivals to pass and checkpoints to reach, but the game's courses were anything but usual. There were five routes in total – four named after the main compass points, plus a circular Offroad track (which the original Japanese flyer stated was for "beginners and women", in a typical case of casual Eighties sexism). Each course was littered with obstacles including gates, walls, trees and rocks... so many rocks. This was not

– racing but navigating – you regularly had to ease off the accelerator and pick the best path through all the hazards. Aiding you were logs that launched you over obstacles, and smaller

"THIS SMALLER UPRIGHT MODEL [BUGGY BOY JUNIOR] WAS STILL AN IMPRESSIVE SIGHT, THANKS TO A PRETEND ROLL CAGE"



» [Arcade] Punting the oversized football awards you with an extra 2,000 points.



WALL



LOG



» [Arcade] The dual bridges can be devious. Misjudge it and you're in the drink mate.

rocks and tree stumps that popped your buggy onto two wheels, allowing you to squeeze through tight spaces, stuntman style. There were also bridges, tunnels and sloped embankments to negotiate. It was far from pure racing but it was a lot of fun with plenty of novelty value. Plus, in the spirit of the arcades, there were additional score-attack elements that involved passing through gates and knocking down coloured flags for bonus points.

Technically *Buggy Boy* was excellent, building on the TX-1 hardware to deliver smooth, sprite-scaled 3D graphics. It wasn't quite as fast or as elegant as Sega's *Hang-On*, which arrived in arcades at the same time, but it was streets ahead of stuff like *Pole Position* and *Konami GT*. Surprisingly, the game was powered by two Intel 8086

BUGGY BOND

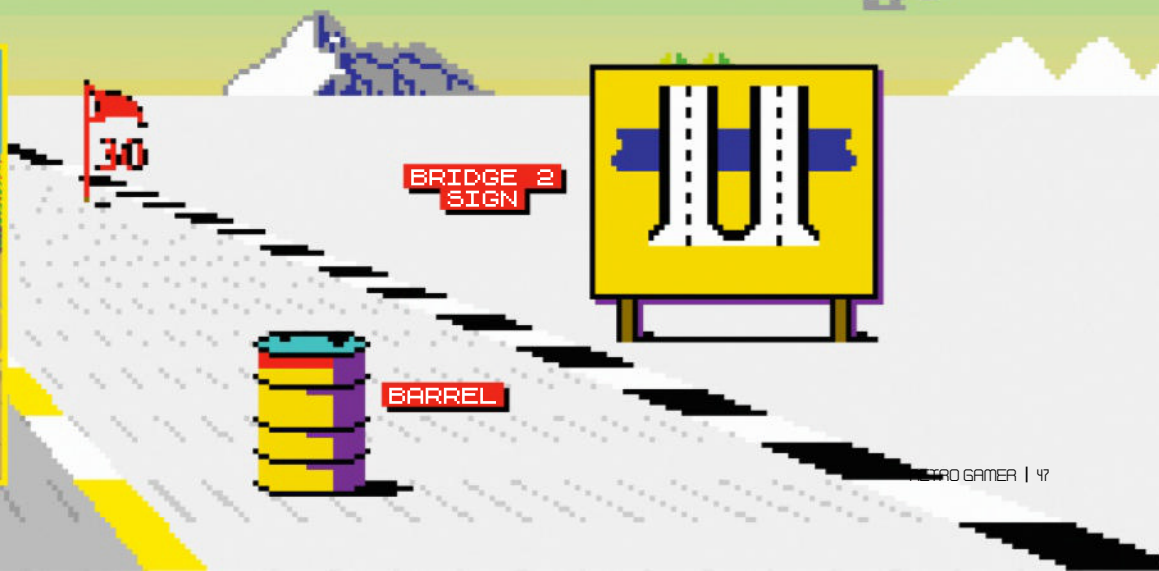
HOW ELITE'S FOLLOW-UP BECAME A 007 ADVENTURE

■ Around the time that *Buggy Boy* was released, Elite Systems made a decision to move away from coin-op conversions, citing the rising cost of licences. Its plan was to release original arcade-style games instead, and one of the first to be developed was *Aquablast*, an unofficial follow-up to *Buggy Boy* that swapped buggies for boats and roads for rivers. The gameplay was similar and so was the underlying code, with the C64, CPC and ST/Amiga versions of *Aquablast* all being built upon *Buggy Boy*'s foundations. Martin Ward has revealed that he introduced many technical enhancements to the 16-bit version, including a faster framerate, improved 3D effects and more colourful backgrounds.

So what happened to *Aquablast*? Shortly before it was completed, Domark saw the game and earmarked it for its next *James Bond* game. A deal was done and the game was retitled *Live And Let Die*, with the content slightly reworked to base it around the lengthy speedboat chase sequence from the movie. As for *Aquablast*, it seems that Domark's 007 licence didn't extend to the US, so the game was published there by Elite under its original title, on the Amiga at least.



» [Amiga] When you got a job to do, you got to do it well... *Aquablast* was turned into *Live And Let Die* (pictured).



DEVELOPER Q&A

MARTIN WARD DEVELOPED THE ATARI ST VERSION FOR ELITE SYSTEMS

What was your opinion of the *Buggy Boy* arcade game?

Elite loaned me its arcade machine and I became quite a fan while I was developing the Atari ST version. This was due to the need to master the game in order to record the complex layout of all the courses. The ST game needed to be the flagship computer version and closely match the arcade game. So, I opted for copying the arcade game's courses as precisely as possible, rather than taking the easier option of generating new course data from scratch. The race courses are actually very skillfully designed, with just the right amount of tempting traps to avoid, and strategically placed bonuses required for progression. There are a lot of fun elements too, I particularly liked the footballs.

How did you manage to replicate the courses so closely?

Once I had mastered the game sufficiently, I hired a video camera for a day and videotaped each course. I then started the painstaking process of stepping through the video using freeze-frame and copying all of the object positions onto paper. It was then just a matter of converting the object layout into a data format that the game could use. Freeze-framing the video also allowed me to pixel-draw the game's sprites as accurately as possible.

Which was the lead version, ST or Amiga?

I was only contracted to develop the ST version. By the time it was completed, Elite decided that it wanted an Amiga version too. I could have done this, but by then I was assigned to develop the 16-bit versions of *Aquablast* (see the *Buggy Bond* panel). The Amiga version of *Buggy Boy* was converted in-house at Elite using my ST source code.

What would you say was the biggest technical challenge you faced?

The framerate on the ST game was never going to reach 50 or 60 frames per

"I HIRED A VIDEO CAMERA AND VIDEOTAPE EACH COURSE..." MARTIN WARD



» Programmer Martin Ward, pictured with the actual Atari ST he wrote *Buggy Boy* on.

second, but I was quite proud of my road-drawing code, which was almost as fast as filling the screen with a solid colour. The code also negated any need for erasing sprites before they were re-rendered on each screen update. There wasn't enough room in memory for the huge sprites of the arcade game, but I did manage to make them as large as possible within the memory available.

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?

The perfectionist in me would have loved to have been able to revisit the game after its release and improve it further with some of the techniques that I used on *Aquablast*. The framerate could have been a bit quicker by using a triple-buffered screen, and palette switching in the horizontal blanking interval would have enabled some nice colour gradients to be used for the skies. But overall the game's technical performance was already favourable compared to similar games.

» To ensure the courses were correct, Martin plotted each and every element on paper.



» [Atari ST] Martin developed the ST version under contract and following its completion joined Elite as a full-time programmer.



» The Japanese flyer shows off the original full-sized cab in all its glory.



» Elite used the upright *Junior* cab as the primary artwork for its home-computer conversions.



» [Mobile] In 2004, Elite produced a passable version for the mobile phones of the era.

"THE CLOSEST TO THE COIN-OP IN OVERALL LOOK AND FEEL WAS THE ATARI ST VERSION"



» [Arcade] Where possible, use the sloped embankments to avoid the worst of the obstacles.

► CPUs, which suggests there was some pretty advanced graphics hardware on the board – particularly as it was outputting video to three separate screens.

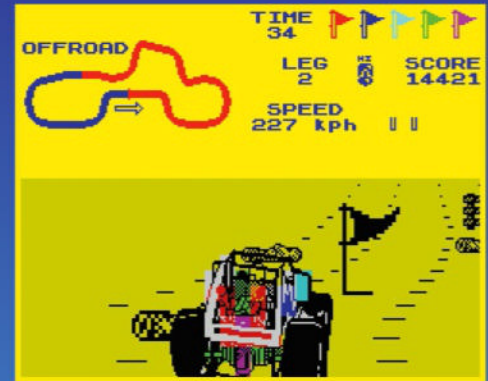
The following year, those three screens became one with the launch of *Buggy Boy Junior* (the updated title was only referenced on the cab's marquee and side-art – in-game it was unchanged). This smaller upright model was still an impressive sight, thanks to a pretend roll cage that extended above and behind the player, but the actual gameplay experience obviously suffered due to the loss of the two 'side' screens. The compact cab was less opulent and also less expensive, which made it a more common sight in arcades and is likely how most players will have encountered the game. In North America, a single-screen version of *Speed Buggy* was issued in similar fashion, although it lacked the cool-looking roll cage.



» [C64] This excellent version was coded by Dave Thomas, who had previously programmed the *Arthur Pendragon* games for Ultimate.

When it came to the home versions, it was hardly surprising that Elite Systems grabbed the licence. The firm already had a solid track record of bringing top Japanese coin-ops to home computers – titles like *Commando*, *Bomb Jack* and *Space Harrier* spring to mind – and *Buggy Boy* proved to be another success. As was typical back then, there were considerable variations between the various versions, as each coder approached the task in different ways.

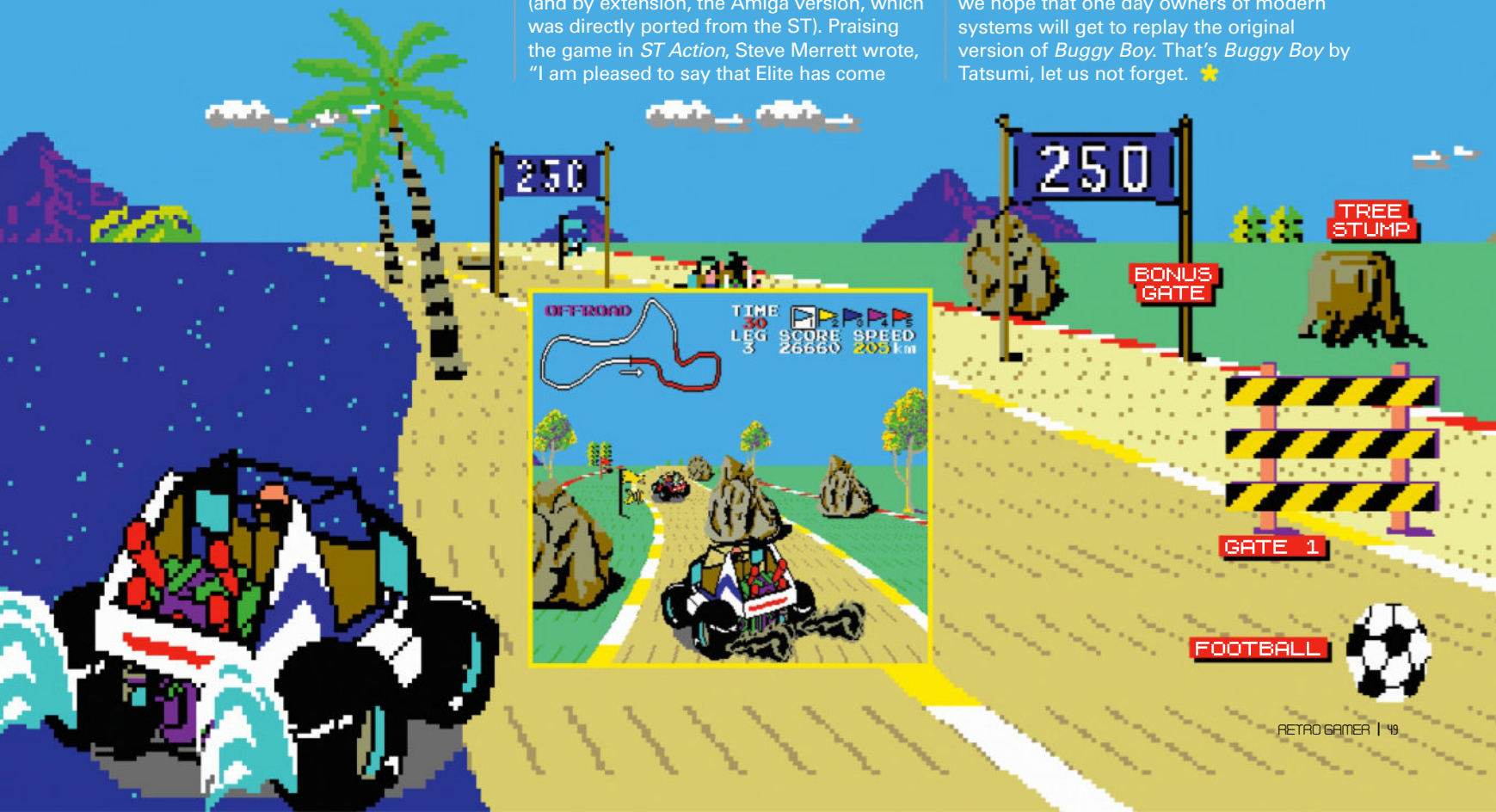
First off the line was the **Commodore 64 version, which arrived just in time for Christmas 1987 and wisely shrunk the graphics down in order to maintain speed and playability** (*Zzap!64* awarded the game 97% and there's a compelling school of thought that it might be even more fun to play than the coin-op). The CPC version followed a similar tack to the C64 release, while the Spectrum version bravely/foolishly tried to retain the original's huge sprites. The closest to the coin-op in overall look and feel was the Atari ST version (and by extension, the Amiga version, which was directly ported from the ST). Praising the game in *ST Action*, Steve Merrett wrote, "I am pleased to say that Elite has come



» [ZX Spectrum] Perhaps surprisingly, the Speccy conversion is the only one that attempts to replicate the coin-op's rolling roads.

up with a near-perfect conversion." *Buggy Boy* was never converted to any consoles, although Elite popped up again in 2004 to put out a licensed version for dumbphones like the Nokia 3200 and Sharp GX10.

As for Tatsumi, the firm is still active and recently celebrated its 50th anniversary (yet it doesn't even have its own Wikipedia entry). It continues to produce coin-ops, although these days they're things like fortune-telling and sticker-printing machines. But it hasn't forgotten about its videogame past as there's a small section on its website dedicated to *Buggy Boy*, *TX-1*, *Apache 3* and the handful of other titles it developed. While there's probably not enough content to warrant a dedicated Tatsumi game collection, it would be great to see individual titles revived, perhaps as part of Hamster's *Arcade Archives* range. Previous remasters of Taito games like *Darius* and *Ninja Warriors* have shown how impressive three-screen games can be when handled properly, so we hope that one day owners of modern systems will get to replay the original version of *Buggy Boy*. That's *Buggy Boy* by Tatsumi, let us not forget. ★



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

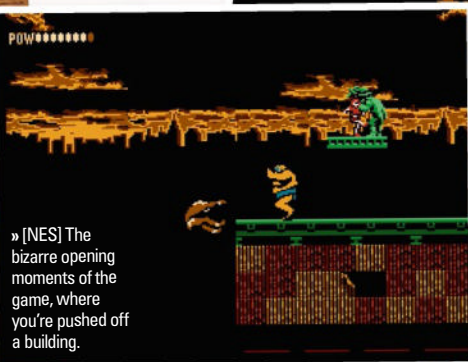
GAMES THAT NEVER SAW THE LIGHT OF DAY

» [NES] Here's your ape performing a giant swing on a kangaroo man, just like Claudio Castagnoli would.



BIO FORCE APE

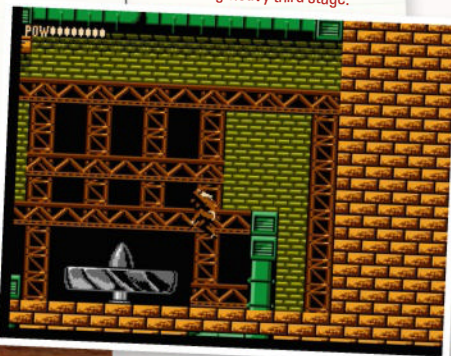
» [NES] The bizarre opening moments of the game, where you're pushed off a building.



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:**
SETA
- » **DEVELOPER:**
SETA
- » **SYSTEM:**
NES
- » **DUE FOR RELEASE:**
1992

» [NES] This fan propels your ape upwards in the platforming-heavy third stage.



It has the title of a B-movie and sounds like a games journalist's fever dream, but this action platformer is one of the most notorious lost NES games

Words by Nick Thorpe

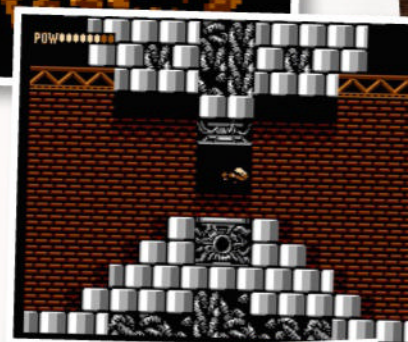
Imagine being a young kid in the early Nineties, flicking through *Nintendo Power*.

One preview stands out above all the others – it details a game that offers “the fastest action ever seen on the NES”, and lets you play as a “genetically altered super chimpanzee” who is “practically indestructible” and has “great pro wrestling-style moves to use against his bizarre opponents”. You’ve been introduced to *Bio Force Ape*, which is clearly going to be the most brilliant game ever made.

It sounds like an elaborate joke, but *Bio Force Ape* was a real game in development by Seta, announced at the 1991 Summer Consumer Electronics Show. It was due to be released in both Japan and North America, and

plenty of kids would have waited patiently for it to arrive, but the game was cancelled shortly before its intended release in April 1992. What could have stopped the most powerful potential protagonist in gaming? No reason for the cancellation was ever given, and that only heightened the intrigue around the game, which became highly sought after by fans.

Prototype hunters were hopeful that the game had been found in 2005 when a user posted about it on the Digital Press forum. However, it turned out to be a hoax, with bizarre supposed characteristics including a fart attack that could corrupt graphics and a butter monster that said, “Ja I am made of dur butter und you are worth 2K monies.” Five



years later, an actual prototype was purchased from Japan and a ROM was dumped, finally allowing players to experience the game for themselves, and a second prototype has since been found that doesn't seem to offer much over the previous one. Still, what exists is just as *Nintendo Power* described it all those years ago. After a messy title screen

APE ALTERNATIVES

TOKI

1991, DAIEI SEISAKUSHO

■ If you want your fix of ape action on the NES, this conversion of TAD Corporation's cult arcade favourite should probably fit the bill, even if you don't get to powerbomb any human-kangaroo hybrids.



NO MORE HEROES

2007, GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE

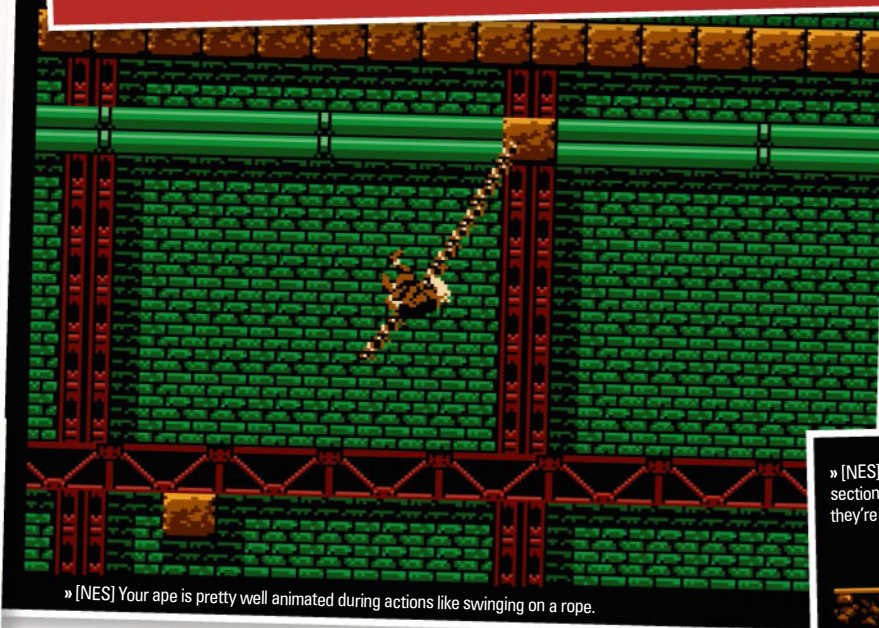
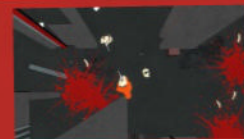
■ Travis Touchdown is no ape, but he is the kind of guy who loves to finish his stunned enemies with a good wrestling move, and that gives him something in common with *Bio Force Ape*'s hero.



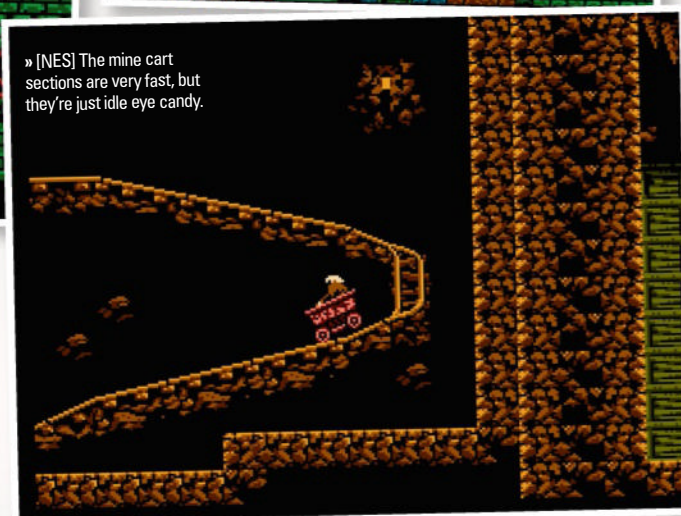
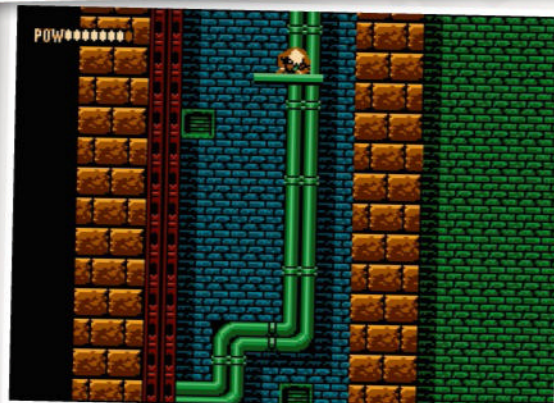
APE OUT

2019, GABE CUZZILLO

■ For a modern take on the concept of apes smashing things including armed humans, this indie game offers minimalist graphics and a fantastic jazz soundtrack that reacts dynamically to the carnage you cause.



» [NES] Your ape is pretty well animated during actions like swinging on a rope.



» [NES] The mine cart sections are very fast, but they're just idle eye candy.

that shows your ape's adopted human family being shoved into a van, you can start a new game. That sees the ape shoved off the top of a very tall building by a sumo wrestler, plummeting to the bottom before being shuttled around at high speeds on green platforms. It's as fast as the preview told players it would be, and the game is just as bizarre. The most notable enemies are human-animal hybrids, including a crocodile man who walks on his crocodile jaws and a bumblebee bloke who can fly around and sting you. Fighting them is very easy – you just walk forward and punch them. Once they're dazed, your

ape will hit them with a wrestling move to finish, such as a giant swing, a powerbomb, or a suplex of the vertical or German variety.

Three stages are available in the prototype. The first contains plenty of enemies to fight, as well as platforming elements like rope swings to get you between platforms. This is made frustrating by the ape's awkward jumping controls, as the ape is quite twitchy in motion. The second stage is much more combat-oriented, with mine cart rides taking you between small rooms that host enemies. Defeating them will reveal new platforms that allow you to make more progress.

"This is clearly not close to being finished, but if we're being honest Bio Force Ape actually benefits from being left in that state"

The third relies far less on combat and instead presents a puzzle, with teleporters to shuttle you around the map and detonators that will blow up TNT barriers. If you get lost, it's possible to bring up a map by pausing the game, though only one quadrant is displayed at any given time. You get a health bar but only one life, meaning that it can be quite tough going, and finishing a stage presents you with a "lap time" display.

This is clearly not close to being finished, but if we're being honest *Bio Force Ape* actually benefits from being left in that state. While

Seta may have been able to tighten up the platforming and make the combat less repetitive, it would also have needed to create some sort of cohesive story to tie the whole thing together. That would ruin the magic – no official explanation for why an ape is fighting a human bumblebee with powerbombs and suplexes is going to match the crazy reasons you can imagine on your own. Likewise, the game's unexplained cancellation has only served to enhance its reputation, turning what might have been an odd footnote in NES history into a legendary name among hardcore fans. ★

THE MAKING OF LLAMASOFT: THE JEFF MINTER STORY



Chris Kohler – editorial director, Digital Eclipse.



JEFF MINTER IS ONE OF GAMING'S TRUE ORIGINALS, A PROLIFIC CREATOR WITH A UNIQUE APPROACH TO GAME DEVELOPMENT - AND NOW HE'S THE SUBJECT OF AN INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTARY. WE SPEAK TO DIGITAL ECLIPSE'S CHRIS KOHLER TO LEARN HOW IT ALL CAME TOGETHER

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

Every creator's story is different, but Jeff Minter is a singular figure in the world of gaming. He's a legend to those in the know, the kind of people that read *Retro Gamer* – a developer whose work you can identify at a quick glance, thanks to his fondness for psychedelia and furry creatures. At the same time, much of his career was spent making games for platforms that were primarily popular in Europe, or simply not popular at all in the case of the Jaguar and the Nuon, ensuring that he's always had a cult audience over his 40 years in game development. Jeff's story is undoubtedly worth telling, but the idea of it being told by an American developer is perhaps surprising.

So why has Digital Eclipse chosen to take on this project? In part, it's a long-held desire to collaborate. "When [Digital Eclipse studio head] Mike [Mika] was a young guy who wasn't in the videogame industry, Jeff was very nice, extended a helping hand to him and kind of got him started on the way," says Chris Kohler, editorial director at the retro-focussed developer. But more than that, it's simply the combination of a unique individual and great games. "We kind of call him 'the last indie developer' in the documentary. That generation of bedroom coders that really founded the British computer games industry, a lot of them either became the CEO of a big company or they fell out of games. But Jeff, he just wanted to keep going and going, and doing his games his way," he explains. "It's a fascinating story for us to tell on the documentary. The games are absolutely solid, and we really want to reintroduce people to Jeff Minter."

Another reason that the team has been passionate about this particular collection is because the formats covered are so unusual. "We feel like vintage computing platforms are a rich vein of really interesting content that does not get released as much, especially not on consoles," says Chris. "Even if you wanted to play some of these games there's so much friction – if you decide, 'Jeff Minter made a version of Centipede for the ZX81, I'd like to try that,' you've got to go find a ZX81 emulator, you've got to find the image of *Centipede* somewhere. Then you're kind of stuck with this



» [PC] Early hit *Gridrunner* is available in both its VIC-20 and Commodore 64 incarnations.



» [PC] Jeff frequently provides his own perspective in both video interviews and text quotes.



» [PC] Games like *Hower Bower* serve to highlight Jeff's distinctive sense of humour.

emulator, and it's like, 'What are the settings, how am I going to actually get this thing to run?' And a lot of people would drop out. You've really got to be dedicated to try to do that."

Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story is the second release in Digital Eclipse's *Gold Master Series*. The project brings together 42 of Jeff's games from 1981 to 1994, covering the ZX81 right up to the Atari Jaguar, but it's not a compilation in the usual sense. "We want to go beyond simply getting the games playable again, we want to put it into an interactive documentary format because we want to use the games to tell a story," Chris

"WE KIND OF CALL HIM 'THE LAST INDIE DEVELOPER' IN THE DOCUMENTARY. THAT GENERATION OF BEDROOM CODERS THAT REALLY FOUNDED THE BRITISH COMPUTER GAMES INDUSTRY"

CHRIS KOHLER

says, explaining the format of the project. This will be familiar to you if you've tried *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration* or the first *Gold Master* release, *The Making Of Karateka*. Rather than simply presenting the player with a list of games, the primary

experience is an interactive timeline which offers up video interviews, photos, interview quotes and more around each game – an approach that has proven to be a highly effective way of giving as much context to each game as possible.

Gathering the materials for such a documentary proved to be an incentive for Jeff to take some time out to look backwards, ▶



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE
- » **DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE
- » **RELEASED:** 2024
- » **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** COMPILATION



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SNK 40TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

SYSTEM: SWITCH, VARIOUS

YEAR: 2018

ATARI 50: THE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS

YEAR: 2022

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE COWABUNGA COLLECTION

SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS

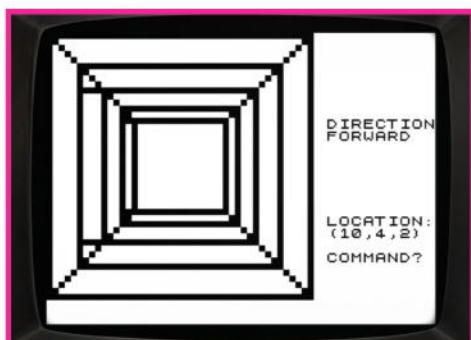
YEAR: 2022



» [PC] Atari ST games are represented here via fan-made Atari Jaguar ports, which work very well.



» [PC] Here's a cup of appropriately British PG Tips, inspired by Jeff's passion for tea.



» [PC] 3D 3D has been adjusted to be faster and more fun, which is definitely for the best.



» [PC] Gary Penn gets to give his side of the Zzap!64 *Mama Llama* review situation.

► rather than beavering away at his next project. "He saw this as a really great opportunity to continue to build his Llamasoft archive and get things scanned," Chris tells us. "He had boxes that were under his bed, full of Llamasoft games and things like that, and he went through a lot of those British videogame magazines month by month, and pulled out anything pertaining to Llamasoft. He did lots of research, he contacted a collector that he knew and he was able to reach out to the wider Llamasoft community, to find things that he didn't even have in his archive."

"HE WAS ABLE TO REACH OUT TO THE WIDER LLAMASOFT COMMUNITY, TO FIND THINGS THAT HE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE IN HIS ARCHIVE"

CHRIS KOHLER

The documentary touches on some potentially sensitive issues – the health issues that Jeff suffered while studying, a game briefly titled *Bomb Buenos Aires* and the near-demise of Llamasoft in the late-Eighties, to name a few. "I'm like, 'Oh, no, is he going to have lots of edits?'" Chris recalls, but Jeff proved to be very candid about the games that he thought weren't up to scratch and allowed for both sides of the *Mama Llama* review drama to be represented. In the end Chris had almost nothing to worry about, with

one amusing exception. "Literally one of the only things that Jeff wrote back and was like 'this will not do' was I had gotten a public domain image of a cup of tea," Chris recalls. "We put that in there with this quote from Jeff about tea being the lifeblood and the engine and the fuel that the British videogame industry runs on, which I thought was such a wonderful quote and so important to put in there because if you're American and you're playing this, you should understand part of that context about where these games came from."

The image, depicting a milk-free cup of tea with the bag left in, just didn't fit, so Chris set about fixing it. "I bought a tea cup with a British flag on it, and then tea, milk – you would never even need to know that I used PG Tips to make the tea in that shot, but I guarantee you that's what's in there."

Of course, all of this is presented in service of understanding the games as well as the man behind them, and the Llamasoft archive presented Digital Eclipse with some work to do since early computer formats are so rarely represented in retro compilations. "I know that there was some new work done as far as the VIC-20, because that's something you typically don't see. I know, there was some new work done for the Sinclair Spectrum and the ZX81," says Chris. Atari ST emulation was a sticking point for *Atari 50*, and the team has had to work around that this time. "The reason why we're

DOCUMENTARY DELIGHTS

SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF LLAMASOFT: THE JEFF MINTER STORY



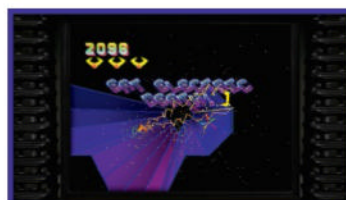
GRIDRUNNER: REMASTERED

■ Digital Eclipse has made a habit of remastering and reimagining classic games, and *Gridrunner* was chosen here as it was one of Jeff's first big hits. Though it's based on the original Commodore 64 code, there's a new 3D graphical layer on show here.



LIGHT FANTASTIC

■ Jeff's passion for light synthesisers is well-known, and two of them have been included here alongside his more traditional games. *Psychedelia* for C64 and *Colourspace* for the Atari 8-bit are present, with controls configured for modern pads.



TIMELESS TEMPEST

■ The amazing shoot-'em-up *Tempest 2000* is presented here, and uses the same Jaguar emulation as *Atari 50*. That makes it one of the best ways to play the game, as you get the option of boosting the framerate and turning on analogue control support.



VIVID VIDEO

■ The documentary includes plenty of video segments, featuring commentary from Jeff as well as a variety of voices from industry peers to journalists and YouTubers. As always, these really help to bring the whole documentary to life.



» [PC] Though the political commentary of *Bomb Buenos Aires* is addressed, a less controversial version is playable.

able to have the Atari ST games represented is because there was already work that was done porting those games to the Jaguar format, and since they share hardware it is an extremely faithful port – it is what you would experience playing the ST versions. But true ST emulation integration is not yet something that we're able to offer, we're not quite there yet," Chris admits.

Those Atari ST to Jaguar ports were originally fan works, and the Digital Eclipse team is well aware of how important the fans really are. "Llamasoft fans, over the years, over the decades, they're so passionate about Llamasoft that they've preserved things and there's so much work that has been done. This is really, built so much on that fan work," Chris acknowledges. "All the work that was done just in making sure that these games were saved from the original media format, and were dumped from the cassette tapes in a way that allows people to play them today, to scanning and cataloging everything. This wouldn't have been possible without the Llamasoft fans, because Llamasoft is Jeff and Giles – they wouldn't have really been able to keep all of this stuff going on their own and still maintain this as just a two-man operation."

On the Digital Eclipse side of things, plenty of time has been invested in making the games as playable as possible – often adjusting keyboard controls to modern control pads, but sometimes going much further. "One of the great examples is *3D 3D*. We have a quote



CONSIDERED CONTROLS

■ Given that plenty of these games originated with keyboard-based controls, many games have been adjusted to fit modern controllers. The result is that they often feel better than if you ran them through a regular emulator with no adjustments.



» [PC] Here's Jeff of the past, enjoying a blast on an original *Tempest* cabinet.

NIXED NO MORE

HOW YOU CAN FINALLY PLAY THE INFAMOUS KONIX MULTISYSTEM

One of the real prizes in this particular project is *Attack Of The Mutant Camels '89* – a version of the game intended for the ill-fated Konix Multisystem. That name will be familiar to British gamers of the era but it's a very obscure piece of history, which Chris sees as an important illustration of just how regionally diverse the gaming market of the late-Eighties was. "From the American perspective, if you had heard of it at all, you had to be a huge nerd reading every issue of *Electronic Gaming Monthly* magazine. Nobody was talking about it in the American magazines with any seriousness," he recalls. "Going back and reading issues of *The Games Machine* and things like that, it was wall to wall coverage, they were very excited about the Konix Multisystem, because Japan had Nintendo and America had Atari, and Britain was going to have its own home-grown videogame system. And that was very important if you were a British videogame developer, because it meant you were going to have that sort of home field advantage on that console that you didn't have with Nintendo and Atari."

The Multisystem was cancelled, so Jeff's demo has never been playable to a general audience before. "We're extremely lucky to



» [PC] Context on the Konix Multisystem is provided for those unaware of the sorry saga.

have gotten to work with the author of the Konix Multisystem emulator," Chris says. "They didn't have a Konix Multisystem, there's no prototype hardware that they had access to, so based on my understanding they had the technical specifications of the machine and they had Jeff's source code for *Attack Of The Mutant Camels '89*, and by essentially comparing those two things they could figure out how the Konix Multisystem worked and write an emulator for it," he explains. "We're very lucky that they were willing to work with us, we were able to integrate it into the Eclipse engine from a technological perspective, and it functioned."



» [PC] The game is only a demo, but offers various weapons to use against the baddies.



» [PC] Text messages like this are a hallmark of Jeff Minter's games to this very day.



» [PC] Paul Docherty, director of *Heart Of Neon*, as seen in *Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story*.

Paul Docherty
DIRECTOR, HEART OF NEON

HEART OF NEON

THE FILM PARTNERSHIP THAT GIVES THE DOCUMENTARY ITS VIDEO

Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story includes plenty of video clips, with interviewees including fans, journalists and other developers as well as Jeff himself. Unlike with previous projects, Digital Eclipse partnered with an external filmmaker named Paul Docherty in order to produce this footage. "At the very beginning of this project, it was like, 'Oh, let's set up a meeting with Paul Docherty,' who we knew was doing this documentary," says Chris, explaining the origins of the partnership. "We had a meeting of, 'Hey, you're doing this, we're doing this, maybe there's a way that we can help each other out.' He's obviously still working on the *Heart Of Neon* documentary, but he had a very early, very lengthy, four-hour rough cut.

"At first, it was like, 'We'd love to just watch that,' because we were doing the research, I was reading the book that Jeff wrote and just absorbing everything I possibly could about *Llamasoft*," Chris continues. "Once we determined what it was we wanted to do, and the schedule and the timeline of the project, it was like, rather than us trying to essentially reinvent the wheel and do these featurettes that we were going to need for our documentary, we figured Paul has been working on this for years and years, and he's probably got tonnes and tonnes of footage. So we approached him to see if we could work

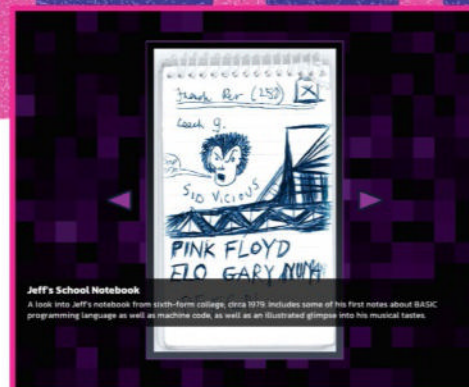
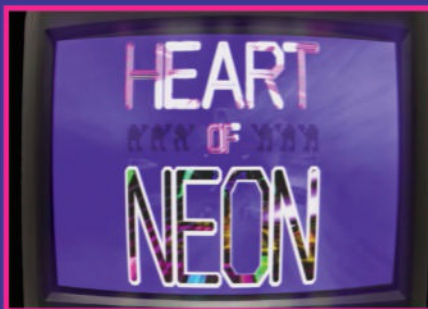
something out where essentially, he would put the featurettes together."

Chris gives most of the credit for the final result to Paul. "We were like, 'For our purposes, here's a list of the ten subjects that we would like to cover, can you do this?' And so he would come back and say, 'This, yes, this probably not.' So then we kind of worked it out," Chris tells us. "Then we handed it off to him, he put them together, we did rounds of feedback, where we'd say, 'We'd like to see more of this, less of that.' It was a collaborative effort, but it was like a 90/10 collaborative effort, where we were doing what we could to help it along. But fundamentally, he directed those."

Because of the wealth of footage available, Chris believes there will be a considerable difference between the interactive documentary and the film. "When you're watching those featurettes, you're not necessarily watching what *Heart Of Neon* is going to be like – he's telling a fundamentally different story. It's about Jeff, but it's about sort of the whole of Jeff's life and all about the person, whereas we're sort of breaking it down into individual stories of individual games, and going into a lot of detail that's not going to be in there. So, if you like what you see, definitely check out *Heart Of Neon* because it's gonna be something different."



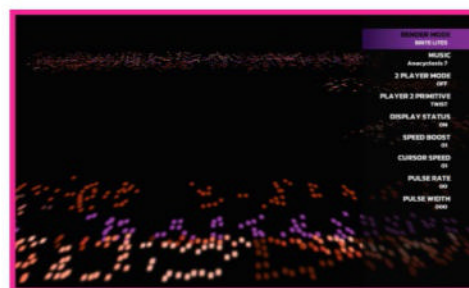
» [PC] Prior to his career in film, one of Paul's early jobs was actually in the games industry.



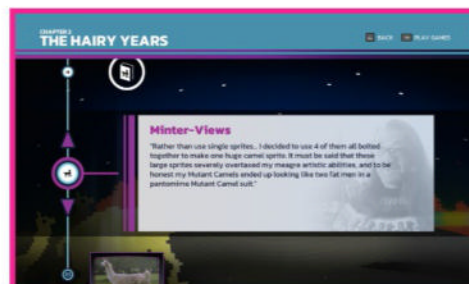
» [PC] Looking at Jeff's sixth-form notebook is absolutely fascinating, for gaming and non-gaming reasons

▶ from [Jeff] in the piece where he's like, 'This game is painfully slow, nobody would ever want to play this.' Other people trying to re-release these games, that might have been something where at the beginning of the project that might have gotten cut," Chris tells us. "From our perspective, we look at it two different ways. Number one, which is, 'Yes, but we should include this as a historical artefact.' We should lean into the fact that it's really difficult to play today, and we should talk about that. Why is it so frustrating to play this? What were the reasons that that all happened? And even beyond that, we're not necessarily asking you as the player to have fun with this, we're asking you to consider it in the history.

"Number two is, can we fix it? When our engineers looked at it, it was like *3D 3D* has essentially two issues. One, it renders incredibly slowly, I mean, if you put it on the standard render mode, it's you're just watching the computer, draw every frame of the maze. And number two, the controls are absolute, they're not relative to the player's position, and it's very difficult to figure out. I work with tremendously talented engineers who are able to look at that and go in and say, 'OK, we've boosted it, so



» [PC] The classic light synthesisers get some excellent new rendering modes using modern hardware.

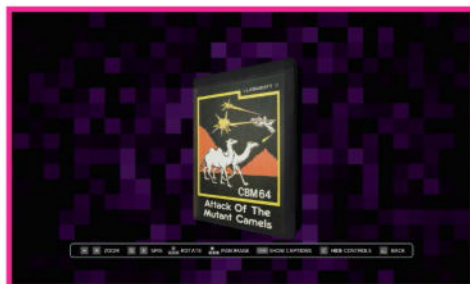


» [PC] Jeff's musings on his own work are always frank and often quite funny.



» [PC] Here's an old Llamasoft stall at a computer fair, the company's main distribution avenue besides mail order.

it runs incredibly quickly.' Now, the integrated controls are essentially FPS controls, and it's fun when you play it, because now it's no longer about fighting with the limitations of the ZX81, it becomes about experiencing the maze that Jeff has designed, and experiencing his game design that way." Chris is quick to note that the original experience hasn't been disregarded, though. "If you want to turn off Boost Mode and put on the old absolute control system, and you want to experience it exactly as it was on the ZX81, not only do we allow it, I push for that sort of stuff because this also should be a historical archive. In presenting it both of those ways, you kind of get to have your cake and eat it too – it's fun and it's historically accurate as well."



» [PC] Game packages and floppy disks are represented as 3D models that can be fully rotated.



» [PC] *Llamatron 2112* is just as enjoyable as you'd expect, given its arcade inspiration.

That's certainly not an approach that can apply to every game, the Digital Eclipse philosophy doesn't require every game to be

fun. "Many games in 2024, you cannot expect the average person to sit down and play it and have a good time playing it, and then even if something is an interesting historical artefact, it doesn't get re-released because the only thought process by which it would be re-released is, 'Well, is this fun for somebody who's going to buy this today?'" Chris sees things a different way. "A lot of the games in *Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story* are quite a bit of fun, even today, and then you have things like *Mama Llama*, which didn't review well. It's got its fans, but if you were to take a game like that, and tee people up for it and say, 'Hey, this game, when it came out was considered to be very confusing, it's got a really steep learning

"IT WAS HIS FIRST BIG WORLDWIDE BREAKOUT HIT, AND IT REALLY DEFINED THE REST OF HIS CAREER GOING FORWARD - IT WAS WHERE EVERYTHING CAME TOGETHER"

CHRIS KOHLER

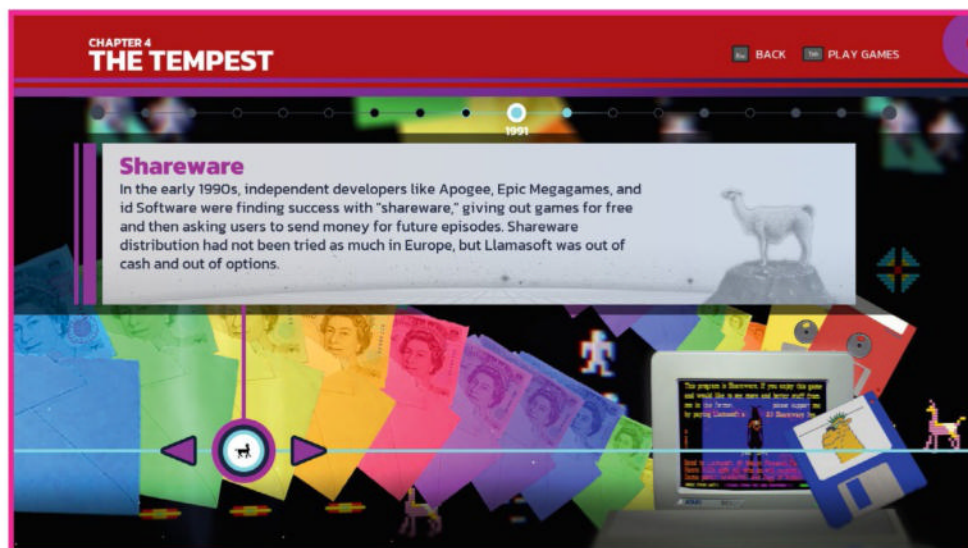
curve, but this is here as part of this larger story,' it lets us include many more things, and lets us really preserve history in that way."

Tempest 2000 is where the playable games end. "That was essentially the extent of what we could emulate, basically," says Chris, noting that the Nuon was "a bridge

too far", but he also feels that it serves as a good place to conclude. "It was his first big worldwide breakout hit, and it really defined the rest of his career going forward – it was where everything came together. It was his love of Atari, his love of arcade shooting games, and his love of classic arcade games, and the light synthesiser visual and audio aesthetic that he had been building with things like *Psychedelia* and *Colourspace* and *Trip-A-Tron*, and it all came together with *Tempest 2000*. He had shooters with interesting visuals, but that was really the first if we want to say 'trippy' Jeff Minter shooter and it's the quintessential Jeff Minter game now."

It's also indicative of the technological path Jeff has travelled, via the likes of the Konix Multisystem, Atari Panther and Nuon. "I think he falls in love with these underdog consoles and keeps having the rug pulled out from under him, but he really creates this incredible history – whatever console he works on, he ends up tending to make the most interesting thing on that console for a while," says Chris. "Sometimes it takes a long time for something to generate the rewards, right? So what may have seemed like a commercial disappointment back in the day, to be able to bring that back now, I think it's very cool. I hope Jeff thinks it's cool that we're able to kind of bring that back in an official way." *

***Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter story* is coming soon to PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch and PC. Physical copies will be available via Limited Run Games.**



» [PC] The interactive timeline format pioneered in *Atari 50works* just as well here.





SoulStar

SOUL OF THE SYSTEM

» RETROREVIVAL



» MEGA-CD » 1994 » CORE DESIGN

One of my earliest conscious retro purchases was a Mega-CD II, which I got for £15 from Cash Concepts. Unfortunately, I found

collecting games for it to be a bit of a rough ride. I was still in secondary school so I had no debit card for eBay purchases and no real income even if I'd had one, so I was mostly limited to the games in Cash Concepts, common ones like *Road Avenger*, *Sol-Feace* and *Cobra Command*. None of these really showed off the scaling and rotation capabilities that had made the add-on so attractive to me, but thanks to glowing reviews in *Sega Pro* and *Sega Magazine*, I knew a game that would – *SoulStar*. I just had to find it.

Some years later, I popped into the same Cash Concepts in search of a little retail therapy after a particularly unpleasant hospital appointment. Karma must have been smiling on me after that experience, because I'd never seen such a brilliant selection of Mega-CD games in there – I walked out with seven games for £28 that day, and one of them was *SoulStar*. By this point though, I was trepidatious as I'd seen the special stages in *Sonic CD* and was unimpressed by their slow rotation. Could it be that these capabilities were rarely utilised because they were a bit crap?

I shouldn't have worried – not only was *SoulStar* the visual showcase I'd spent years hoping for, it was a rather lovely shoot-'em-up to boot. The opening space stage showed me smooth scaling sprites, and the subsequent levels provided welcome variety by swapping out the linear blasting for free-roaming action in a copter and a combat walker. It's a little frustrating to think that so many developers chased the FMV trend when the Mega-CD was capable of games like this, but Core Design was a top-tier studio on the Mega-CD. Could many others have produced anything of *SoulStar*'s standard? ★

TANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

JONATHAN GRIFFITHS' GAMING ODYSSEY

20TH CENTURY TANK WARFARE AND EVEN A HINT OF CLASSIC OUTER SPACE COMBAT AND TRADING ARE ALL TO BE FOUND IN JONATHAN GRIFFITHS' BACK CATALOGUE, BUT HIS JOURNEY INTO GAMES DEVELOPMENT BEGAN WITH MORE MODEST ARCADE GAMES FOR THE ACORN ATOM AND THE BBC MICRO

WORDS BY RICHARD HEWISON

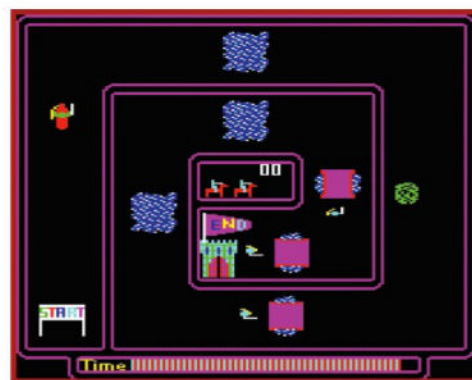
Jonathan Griffiths grew up near Dover in Kent and spent his early student days in a grammar school, not encountering computers until he was doing

A levels in the sixth form. "We initially had a teletype terminal connected to an ICL 2900 Mainframe based at the University Of Kent in Canterbury," explains Jonathan. "That was the first six months or so and then the school got an RML 380Z. Around the same time I was following all the adverts in the computer magazines, and I put an order in for the Sinclair ZX80. Shortly afterwards I saw adverts for the Acorn Atom, so I cancelled my ZX80 order and went for an Acorn Atom kit instead."

With help from a classmate, Jonathan built the Acorn Atom and immediately began to experiment with it. "My first game was written in half a kilobyte with the other half a kilobyte used by the screen memory. I was doing my A level in computer science using the 380Z, but three of us on the course rapidly overtook our teacher and we egged each other on to learn 6502 and Z80 assembler."

Being quick learners, the trio began writing games together for the ZX81 and the Acorn Atom and advertised them in the summer of 1981 as Paranoid Software in magazines like *Personal Computer World* and *Computing Today*, so named because they were all fans of *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*. "I can't remember exactly how many copies we sold, but it was derisory," Jonathan admits. However, despite the less-than-spectacular sales figures, Jonathan remained keen on writing games, and his enthusiasm quickly became a costly obsession. "I applied to five universities and Exeter offered me a place on their course and all I had to do was get two E grades. I was taking maths, physics, and computer science, but I failed to get the two Es I needed. I got a D for computing, an O and a U, and I'd never even heard of those two grades before!"

That's when lady luck came to the rescue. A friend of Jonathan's was visiting from the University Of Cambridge, and he suggested that Jonathan should send his Atom games to Acornsoft who were based in Cambridge. "On the strength of those games David



» [BBC Micro] One of Jonathan's freelance games was *The Horse Lord* on the BBC micro, based on Peter Morwood's novel.

Johnson-Davies at Acornsoft asked me to come along for a chat," says Jonathan. "This was around September 1981, and they offered me a job. I decided to not retake my A levels but took up the job offer instead which sounded much more fun!"

With his games published on an Acornsoft Atom compilation tape, Jonathan embarked on his professional programming career writing games inspired by the arcade cabinets found in the local pubs. *Snapper*, *Rocket Raid* and *JCB Digger* were all written for the new Acorn BBC Micro, and the chance also came for Jonathan to author a book called *Creative Assembler – How to Write Games*, published by the Acorn Computer Library imprint of Penguin Books. "David Johnson-Davies suggested doing it. He'd written the Atom programming manual called *Atomic Theory And Practice* which I knew rather well because I'd read it cover to cover when I was first playing with my Atom. He suggested lifting bits from that, rewriting it for the BBC and adding to it."

It wasn't long afterwards that Jonathan made the decision to leave Acornsoft and go self-



» [BBC Micro] The original version of *Snapper* was so similar to *Pac-Man* that the main sprites had to be changed.



» [BBC Micro] Here's the updated version of *Snapper* which adds the new sprites, including a hat for its main character.

"I DECIDED TO NOT RETAKE MY A LEVELS BUT TOOK UP THE JOB OFFER INSTEAD WHICH SOUNDED MUCH MORE FUN!"

JONATHAN GRIFFITHS

employed, but why did he choose to go out on his own? "Someone left the sales figures for *Snapper* lying around, and I realised I could be making four times what I made as an employee by going freelance!"

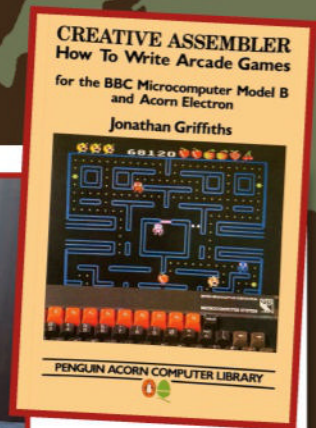
Ironically, one of Jonathan's earliest freelance contracts was for Acornsoft, writing the Acorn Electron version of *Snapper*. He also wrote articles for *Acorn User* magazine, before an unexpected phone call opened up other avenues. "Out of the blue Jacqui Lyons phoned and asked if I wanted an agent. I'd never had an agent before but thought, 'Why not?' and she quickly found Century Communications who had this book called *The Horse Lord* and they were keen to have a game to go alongside it."

The connection with Jacqui and her agency Marjacq Micros came through Jonathan's friendship with David Braben, with the two having first met when *Elite* was being developed for Acornsoft. David was one of Jacqui's earliest clients.

Jonathan freely admits that *The Horse Lord* for the BBC Micro wasn't his finest hour, and after a brief sojourn to work freelance for Clarke's shoes, programming a cutter that produced physical three-dimensional cardboard models from 3D CAD shoe designs, he returned to Acornsoft once again. This



The tabletop micro-tank wargames Jonathan plays inspired all of his tank computer games.



JONATHAN GRIFFITHS

■ Although he worked on other unrealised game designs, Jonathan eventually moved into coding embedded firmware for smart devices, including security sensors, smart plugs and GPS trackers.

GRIFFITHS' GEMS OTHER GAMES JONATHAN CODED OR WORKED ON



SNAPPER

BBC MICRO, ACORN ELECTRON

■ An unashamed homage to *Pac-Man*, *Snapper* was released by Acornsoft for the BBC micro in two versions. The original was a little too close to the coin-op, and so the music, items and appearance of the characters were changed for version two.



ROCKET RAID

BBC MICRO

■ Another early title, *Rocket Raid* was a fairly typical sideways-scrolling shooter using the bright and sometimes rather garish BBC Micro colour palette to mimic the coin-op *Scramble*. Shoot ground-based enemies and missiles, collect fuel and survive for as long as possible.



JCB DIGGER

BBC MICRO

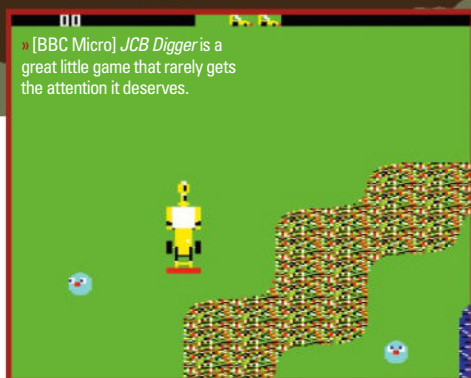
■ An early example of a licensed product computer game tie-in. *JCB Digger* featured an eponymous yellow digger machine. Due to the licensing deal, the JCB wasn't depicted as being damaged or destroyed. Instead, the player was thrown from the cabin when a life was lost.



FRONTIER: ELITE 2

ATARI ST, COMMODORE AMIGA, IBM PC

■ Jonathan contributed various 3D objects to David Braben's first sequel to *Elite*, released in 1993. His domed city structures, tall futuristic buildings, and white clouds greeted players as soon as they got a first glimpse of the landing pad on Ross 154 or the terraformed surface of Mars.



» [BBC Micro] *JCB Digger* is a great little game that rarely gets the attention it deserves.



» [Amiga] David Braben let Jonathan use his 3D engine created for *Zarch/Virus* for all three tank games.

► time, it was to write a filing system for the educational title *The Domesday Project*, which coupled a BBC Micro with a LaserDisc player. You could say that both of Jonathan's contracts at the time were cutting edge, but in very different ways.

"They already had a hard disk filing system written by Hugo Tyson, who had written the BBC Micro's 6502 ADFS, but they wanted a modification of that to cope with the data coming from the video disk player," says Jonathan. "I had great fun doing that and also writing other things like the mouse pointer which sounds trivial now but back then we had a great big tracker ball."

Jonathan was also experimenting with the Commodore 64 to see what it was capable of, but he quickly got distracted by developments

at Acorn. "I still had lots of friends at Acorn, and we all knew about this ARM processor. There was a predecessor to the Archimedes, a prototype machine called the A500. Acorn made quite a few of them and they were going to have the ARX operating system, but eventually Acorn went with the Arthur operation system, so named because you design it on a Monday, write it on a Tuesday, test it on a Wednesday, and release it on a Thursday, thus ARM by Thursday, or 'Arthur'. Basically, it was a BBC Micro-style operating system and then they wrote a GUI front-end on it and called it RISCOS."

It was clear that the ARM processor in the Archimedes, and the 68000 in the recent Atari ST and Commodore Amiga computers were the way to go, so Jonathan turned his attention to those platforms, and the type of games he



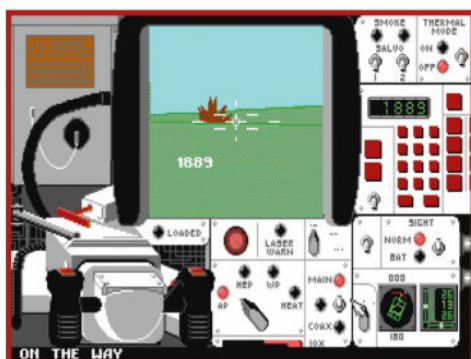
» [BBC Micro] *Rocket Raid* is a fantastic clone of *Defender* that highlighted Jonathan's slick coding skills.

wanted to do next had close ties with one of his hobbies. "Paul Fellows at Acorn and I both had an interest in playing World War II micro-tank games. Micro tanks are 1/300th scale models of armoured tanks. I thought it would be fun to actually play with them in a computer game."

The game that Jonathan began developing was called *Conqueror*, and he got some invaluable technical assistance from a good friend. "I'd been on holiday with David Braben, and he said if I was at a loose end did I want to use his graphics engine to do my next game?"

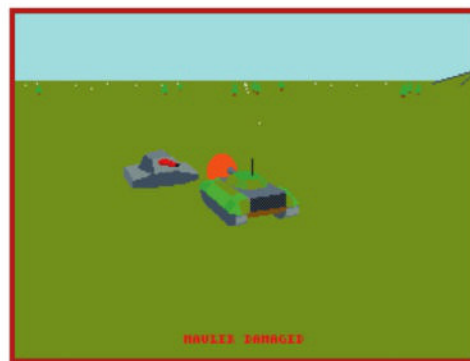
The engine David was offering had recently been developed for the 3D objects and undulating landscapes seen in his *Lander* demo given with the Archimedes computer range at launch, and subsequently used in the full *Zarch* game published by Superior Software, and for the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga versions renamed *Virus* and published by British Telecom's Firebird Software label. "I'd originally tried doing a tank game in 2D on the Commodore 64," says Jonathan. "I was trying to do a turret eye view looking onto the battlefield more like *Battlezone*, but I didn't know how to do 3D graphics. I had tried creating various sprites of different sizes and shapes to

WAGES OF WAR WHAT OTHER TANK GAMES WERE BATTLING FOR SUPREMACY?



MICROPROSE M1 TANK PLATOON

■ Simulation specialists MicroProse released this game in 1989 on PC and 1990 for Amiga and Atari ST. Not just a 3D tank simulator but a full-scale strategy game with NATO confronting the Warsaw Pact countries. The game gave the player control of multiple vehicles and troops.



BATTLE COMMAND

■ A futuristic battleground was the setting for this 3D arcade strategy tank game created by 3D experts Realtime Games Ltd and released by Ocean Software in 1990. It's considered by many people to be a spiritual successor to Realtime's seafaring 3D arcade strategy game *Carrier Command*.



ABRAMS BATTLE TANK

■ US developer Dynamix also gave players command of an M1A1 Abrams Main Battle Tank in a solid 3D simulator, with eight challenging scenarios to battle through, including the option to play each scenario in isolation, or as part of an overall campaign.

indicate the angle of the tank, but it really didn't look very convincing because they were all single-colour sprites and very low resolution."

Using David's engine freed Jonathan to concentrate on the tanks and other 3D objects designs and the game mechanics. "I put in some of my favourite tanks, and then gave the player direct command of one and had hosts of enemies attacking them from all sides. They had to clear each level of enemy tanks before moving on to the next. There wasn't a great deal more to it than that." Jonathan's brief description does *Conqueror* a disservice. The basic premise was simple, but Arcade, Attrition and Strategy modes gave the playing experience some depth. It took a while to get used to the combination of keyboard and mouse to control the player's tank, but it quickly became second nature.

"The Archimedes version was written first and published by Superior who had ties with Acornsoft. The publishing rights for each version were sorted out by Jacqui Lyons. I then converted the finished game to the 68000 machines," explains Jonathan. German publisher and developer Rainbow Arts released the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga versions, with Chris Sawyer tackling the game on the PC. "When I came to do *Campaign*, I decided that I wanted a larger playing area. However, that meant that the hills effectively disappeared because computationally they were quite expensive. You couldn't have an infinite quantity of rolling landscapes which is what I really wanted, so unfortunately they had to go."

As the name suggests, *Campaign* was more strategic than *Conqueror*. The player chose to play either as the Allied British, American, ►



» [Archimedes] Jonathan wrote the Acorn Archimedes version of *Conqueror* first, before converting it to other platforms.



» [Amiga] The in-game map in *Conqueror* gave you a chance to plan a winning strategy.

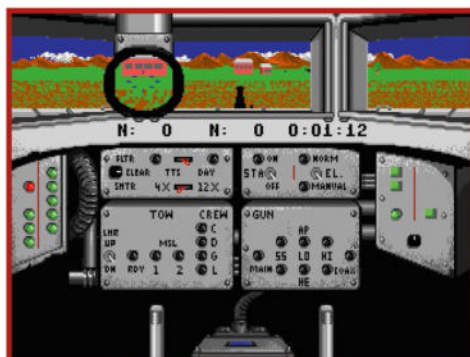
**"SOMEONE LEFT THE SALES
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LYING AROUND, AND I
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BY GOING FREELANCE!"
JONATHAN GRIFFITHS**



» [Amiga] The attract mode on the Amiga version of *Conqueror* was aiming for the player's attention.

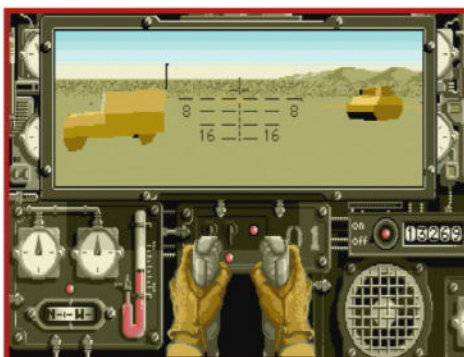


» [Amiga] When defeated by an enemy tank in *Conqueror*, the tank was knocked out of the battlefield.



STEEL THUNDER

■ Accolade's game featured four different American WWII tanks to choose from, including the M1A1, the M60A3 and the M3 Bradley. As with the other tank games, choosing and equipping your tank was all part of the experience, but *Steel Thunder* was visually less appealing than the competition.



SHERMAN M4

■ French publisher Loricel entered the tank battle in the late-Eighties with its *Sherman M4* game. Offering various options including a desert campaign, this was a little more arcade than simulation, but was still an entertaining effort which was highly configurable.

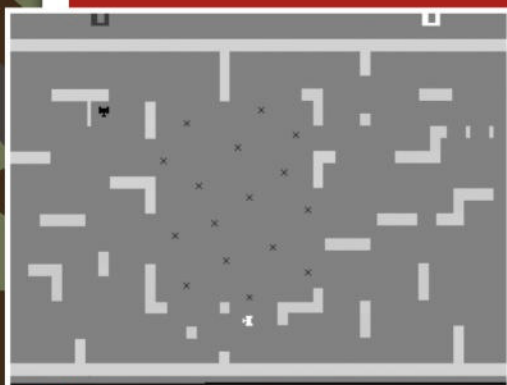
TANK TRACKS THROUGH THE AGES

TANK GAMES HAVE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART IN VIDEOGAME HISTORY

■ One of the earliest arcade cabinets ever produced was *Tank* from Atari and Kee Games in 1974, which simplistically depicted two tanks roving around an open arena with various walls and obstacles to hide behind, with the ultimate goal to destroy the other tank. That top-down view would influence various tank games that appeared later, and that lineage was transformed in 1980 thanks to Atari's 3D vector *Battlezone*. The 1981 pseudo-computer-generated imagery that appeared in the *Tron* movie from Walt Disney included a sequence with battling tanks, which then inspired a whole slew of arcade and home-computer games afterwards, although based on fantasy vehicles rather than real tank hardware.

The various home-computer titles ramped up the genre by the end of that decade, with simulators like Microprose *M1 Tank Platoon*, and *M1A1 Abrams Battle Tank* from Sphere, and then up-to-date titles like the modern online multiplayer *World Of Tanks* from Wargaming Group Limited has brought tank games into the 21st Century with a bang.

The question is, does Jonathan play modern tank games himself? "I still play micro-tank wargames, but I don't play any computer games. I always enjoyed writing them, but other people usually beat me at my own games!"



» [Arcade] *Tank* coin-op (1974).



» [Amiga] Knowing the statistics for each tank in your armoury was vital for a successful battle outcome.

► French and Russian forces, or as the Axis forces of Italy, Germany, and Japan during World War II. They could further refine the game by choosing which of their battle groups' strategic decisions were controlled by them, and which were chosen by the computer. Air and sea vehicles were also introduced, as was a modicum of resource management for producing replacement vehicles.

Retaining a heavily tweaked and customised version of David Braben's game engine code for positioning his 3D objects, *Campaign* also had additional input from graphic artist Saul Murchese and technical help from Rik Yapp at Oxford Digital Enterprises (ODE). "One of the things about the tabletop games was that we'd often play them as a whole sequence of games, so each game was one battle, but you can imagine the battle taking place in a much longer sequence of battles, hence the name *Campaign*," says Jonathan. "I wanted to try and recreate that feeling where each tank



» [Amiga] An impressive graphical introduction set the tone for the Amiga and PC versions of *Campaign*.

"I WANTED TO TRY AND RECREATE THAT FEELING WHERE EACH TANK BATTLE WOULD FEED INTO THE NEXT..."
JONATHAN GRIFFITHS

battle would feed into the next, so if you hadn't destroyed enough of the enemy then they could still be there to attack you later."

The early Nineties was a period on the cusp of transition from 16-bit computers like the ST and Amiga, to the more capable and quickly improving PC platform and the imminent move to home consoles. Was Jonathan aware of the competition in the marketplace as far as strategic wargames was concerned at that time? "I didn't really play other computer games, since my ideas all came from playing micro-tank wargames, with their higher points values for faster, better armed and better armoured tanks. Players could make evenly balanced forces using a budget of points, either having lots of light tanks, or a few heavies, or, more likely a mix of both with lots of medium tanks."

A larger series of maps, many more tanks, aircraft and battleships gave *Campaign* the advantage over *Conqueror*, but once his new publisher Empire Software had released the game for the Amiga, Atari ST and PC (with Chris Sawyer once again looking after that version), Jonathan was keen to improve certain aspects of the design, resulting in the inevitable sequel. "I decided to set *Campaign II* in the post Second World War era covering the Arab Israeli conflicts and various other Cold War scenarios of the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties, which meant I added helicopters and infantry so you could have troop carriers disgorging their troops who would run around the battlefield with their anti-tank missiles."



» [Amiga] Vehicles other than tanks also featured prominently in *Campaign*, including air support from the RAF.

The sequel used an enhanced version of the original *Campaign* system, and the wider scope gave the game a bigger, more epic feel to it. Ian Bird wrote the PC version, and Jonathan coded the Amiga original, with the Atari ST no longer considered a commercially viable platform by 1994.

Both *Campaign* games contained a set number of vehicles and troops. Every battle was contributing to a war of attrition, and the entire *Campaign* game was won or lost when the player or the opposition had no more tanks left to deploy. When it came to the enemy's tactics, Jonathan admits that the intelligence behind their decisions wasn't particularly sophisticated. "I tried writing instructions to allow them to execute traditional tactics, such as a pincer manoeuvre, or even just a frontal assault, but I couldn't work out how to make it work, so I ended up with the tanks mostly driving from one place to another, and if they found an enemy, they just shot at it!"

Regardless, the excellently presented package for both *Campaign* games did a great job of hiding those titles' more modest under-the-hood tactics. The illusion was sufficient enough for both games to review and sell well in an increasingly competitive market.

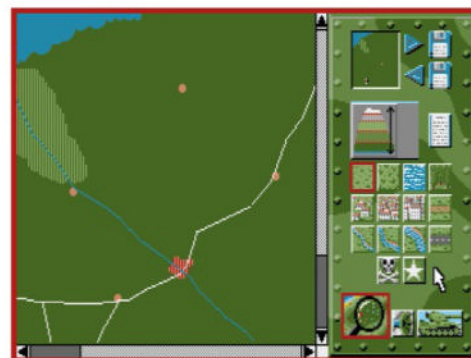
In between his *Campaign* titles, Jonathan was able to pay back his friend David Braben's kindness by pitching in with some 3D object work for an eagerly anticipated sequel to a very famous space trading and exploration game. "David said, 'How about doing some planetary scenery, like

all the domes and buildings, clouds and trees?'" recalls Jonathan, who had previous experience using David's 3D engine as employed in *Zarch* and *Virus*. The game in question was *Frontier*, the first follow-up to *Elite*, and Jonathan's contribution appeared in both the Amiga and IBM PC versions released in 1993.

After *Campaign II*'s release, Jonathan realised that games development was radically changing, and more complex console hardware was starting to dominate the market. "I spent a year or so on two ideas before giving up," says Jonathan. "The first was based around a terrorist threat and the second one I remember more about was an idea for doing a Twenties gangster game, with Al Capone. I plotted the whole of Chicago into the PC, and I had 3D people walking around, but the problem was all the detail on the faces was missing, so I tried to add scanned in photos on top of their faces. It was looking sort of all right and then I started seeing some of the other games that Jacqui was representing, and it really showed that I was trying to do it on my own and everyone else had teams of people." *



» [Amiga] *Campaign II* upped the game by introducing more recent battle scenarios, including the use of helicopters.



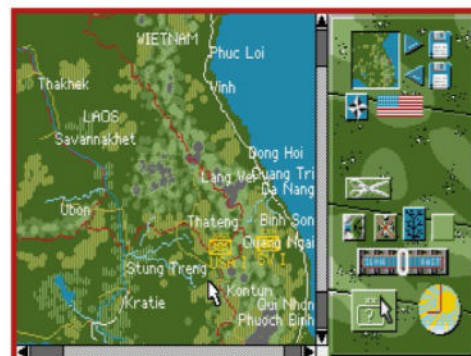
» [Amiga] One neat feature in *Campaign* was the ability to edit and change the map.



» [Amiga] Trigger-happy tank commanders were tempted to shoot first and ask questions later in *Campaign*!



» [Atari ST] A typical allied armoured tank division, with three different types of tank available in *Campaign*.



» [Amiga] Close quarters tank battle action in 3D appeared if you chose manual control of a battle.

Chikyuu Kaihou Gun ZAS

How did T&E Soft manage to turn one of the Game Boy's most noticeable flaws to its advantage?

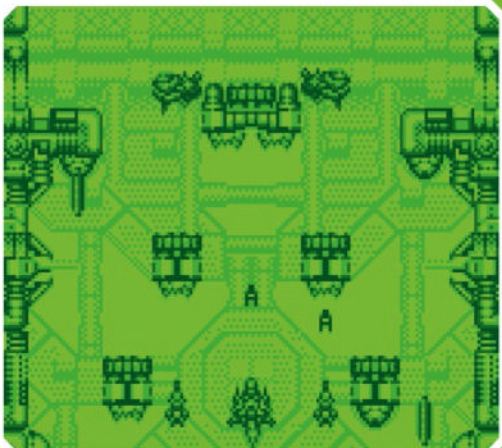
» PLATFORM: GAME BOY » RELEASED: 1992 » DEVELOPER: T&E SOFT

It really is amazing how far LCD technology has come – the TVs and other displays we use today are a world apart from early examples of the technology. If you ever played an early handheld console like the Game Boy or Game Gear, you'll be very familiar with the ghosting effect that accompanied any moving graphics, which made high-speed games less than ideal for portable play.

But what happens if a developer works with the peculiar characteristics of those early displays, rather than against them? *Chikyuu Kaihou Gun ZAS* provides an excellent case study in that. T&E Soft's Japan-only shoot-'em-up manages to simulate two background layers, relying on the slight image retention of the Game Boy's display to effectively blend two totally different backgrounds that alternate at high speed. Meanwhile, the scrolling is kept fairly slow and sprite movement is of a moderate speed, to ensure the action is easy to follow.

Combined with a high standard of pixel art, it makes for one of the most impressive-looking Game Boy games. The only problem with this trick is that since it relies on the characteristics of the original Game Boy's display, it looks far less impressive on more responsive displays. Playing it on a Super Game Boy or Game Boy Color makes for a fairly miserable experience, as the flickering background is highly distracting.

Chikyuu Kaihou Gun ZAS is also fun to play – it's a tough cookie with plenty of action going on. However, as is so often the case with such showcase games, it's extremely expensive. A loose cartridge will run you hundreds of pounds and complete copies are listed for the price of a rather nice holiday. But for those with the right hardware and the deep pockets to enjoy it, there's nothing like it on the Game Boy. ★

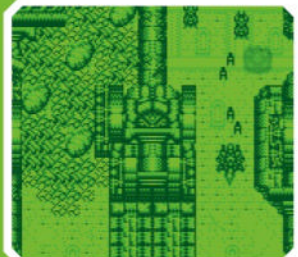


HOW IT PUSHED THE LIMITS...



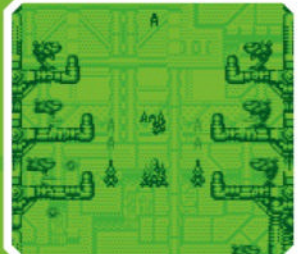
Big Bosses

A common trick in 8-bit shmups is the use of background tiles rather than sprites to represent the largest enemies, and T&E Soft used it for boss fights in *Chikyuu Kaihou Gun ZAS*.



Subtle Shading

Working well with the Game Boy's limited palette, the art in the game uses light colours for backgrounds and darker colours for foreground elements, while packing in plenty of visual detail.



All Action

Chikyuu Kaihou Gun ZAS throws around a lot of enemies and enemy fire without slowing down noticeably, but the action does bump up against the Game Boy's sprite drawing limits at times.



Wobbly Warping

The third stage doesn't just use the dual-layer illusion, but adds another impressive effect on top by applying line scrolling to the upper layer, allowing the floating shapes to visibly warp.

SCORE

80105

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Klax

» PLATFORM: LYNX » RELEASED: 1990 » DEVELOPER: TENGEN

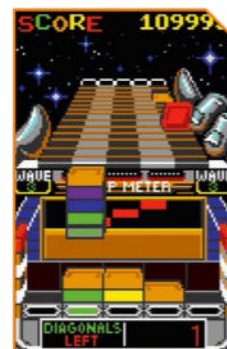
very handheld needs a great puzzle game, and for the Lynx that game is *Klax*. It's a block-dropper with a twist, quite literally as you need to hold Atari's powerful portable vertically in order to see the action properly. It makes perfect sense given the game's long conveyor belt of tiles, and gives the game a distinctive feel compared to just about everything else you could play.

Experimenting with the game, you quickly figure out that it's not too hard to line up three tiles in the 5x5 bin the game gives you, and quickly set about trying to make something more ambitious – a big X shape that uses all the space available. It's a bit of an engineering feat as you have to prevent an inadvertent match from collapsing your structure, but getting it done makes you proud. The sixth stage promises a big warp for repeating the feat. Surely it can't be that hard? *

MORE CLASSIC KLAX MOMENTS

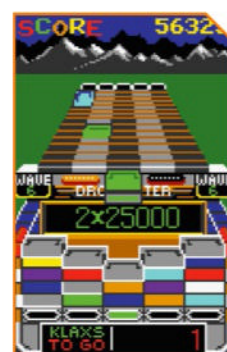
Doing Diagonals

Rather than the endless action of *Tetris* or *Columns*, *Klax* breaks the game into stages with specific goals. Requiring diagonals is a tricky one, since you need just as many tiles to support a diagonal as you do to match one, leaving you with garbage to clear up or reuse.



Smooth Speech

Klax has some rather excellent audio, but the most surprising aspect of it is that there's a good amount of speech in there. It feels really great when you perform a great match and hear "Yeah!" and the same goes for the round of applause at the end of a stage.



BIO

Atari Games' *Klax* is one of the better falling-block puzzle games that appeared in the wake of *Tetris*, and it was certainly one of the most prolific. *Klax* appeared on everything from the Amstrad GX4000 and Atari 2600 to the X68000 and the ZX Spectrum but despite the split of Atari Corporation and Atari Games, it always felt particularly at home on the Lynx. It may no longer be the Nineties, but any puzzle game fan will always have time for a *Klax* session.



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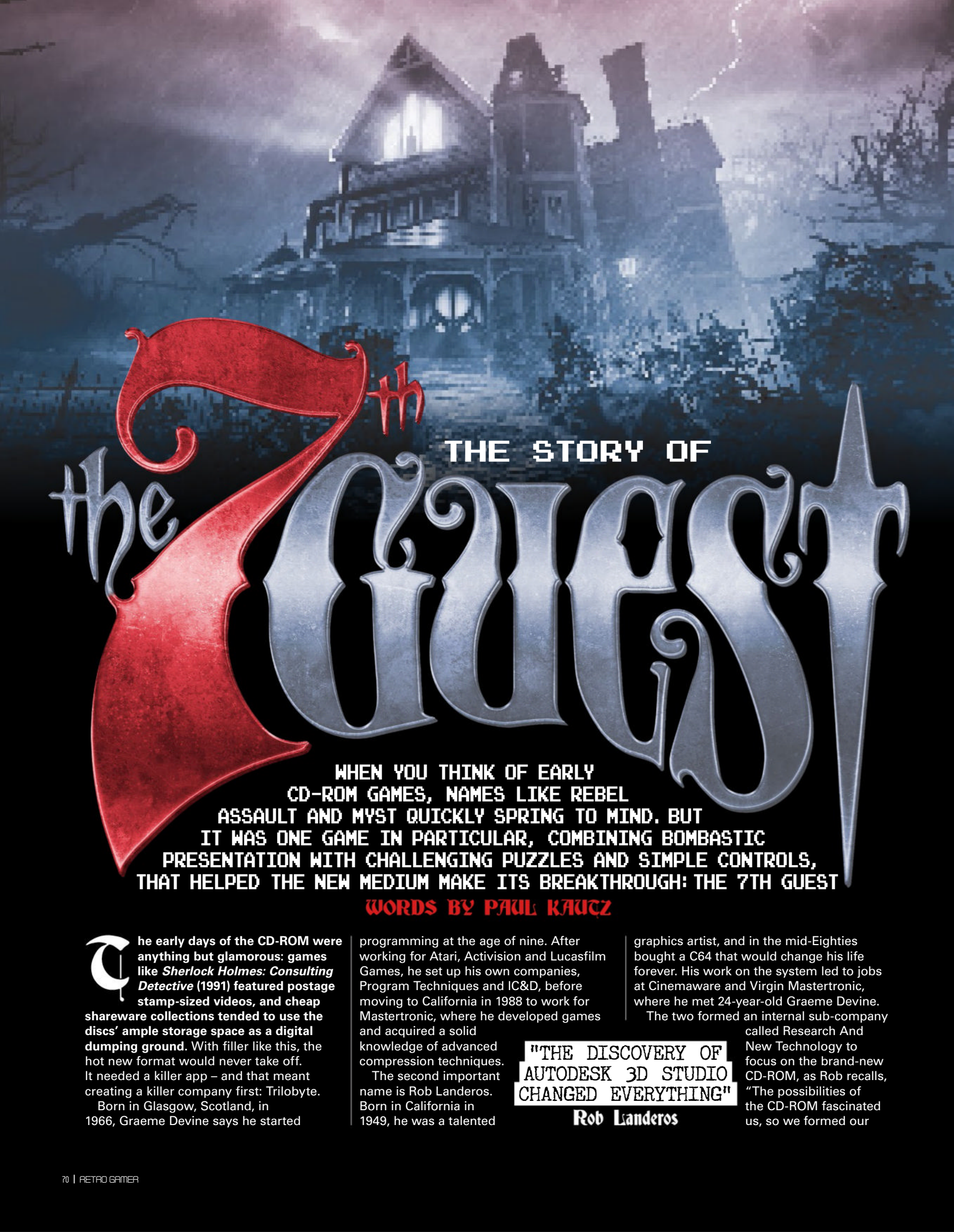
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the 7th Guest

THE STORY OF

WHEN YOU THINK OF EARLY CD-ROM GAMES, NAMES LIKE REBEL ASSAULT AND MYST QUICKLY SPRING TO MIND. BUT IT WAS ONE GAME IN PARTICULAR, COMBINING BOMBASTIC PRESENTATION WITH CHALLENGING PUZZLES AND SIMPLE CONTROLS, THAT HELPED THE NEW MEDIUM MAKE ITS BREAKTHROUGH: THE 7TH GUEST

WORDS BY PAUL KAUCZ

The early days of the CD-ROM were anything but glamorous: games like *Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective* (1991) featured postage stamp-sized videos, and cheap shareware collections tended to use the discs' ample storage space as a digital dumping ground. With filler like this, the hot new format would never take off. It needed a killer app – and that meant creating a killer company first: Trilobyte.

Born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1966, Graeme Devine says he started

programming at the age of nine. After working for Atari, Activision and Lucasfilm Games, he set up his own companies, Program Techniques and IC&D, before moving to California in 1988 to work for Mastertronic, where he developed games and acquired a solid knowledge of advanced compression techniques.

The second important name is Rob Landeros. Born in California in 1949, he was a talented

graphics artist, and in the mid-Eighties bought a C64 that would change his life forever. His work on the system led to jobs at Cinemaware and Virgin Mastertronic, where he met 24-year-old Graeme Devine.

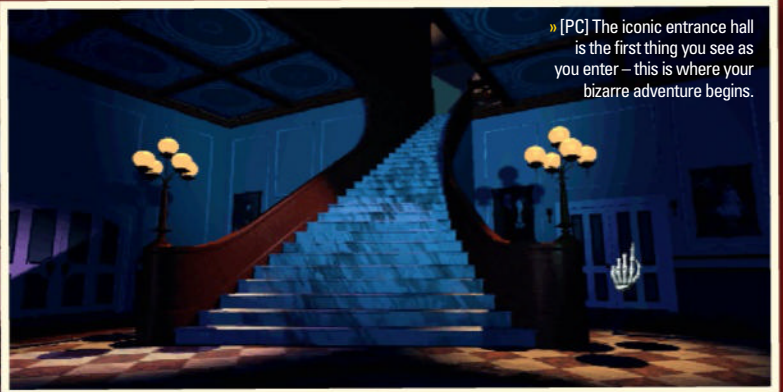
The two formed an internal sub-company called Research And New Technology to focus on the brand-new CD-ROM, as Rob recalls, "The possibilities of the CD-ROM fascinated us, so we formed our

**"THE DISCOVERY OF
AUTODESK 3D STUDIO
CHANGED EVERYTHING"**

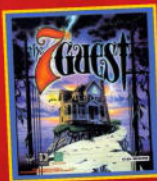
Rob Landeros



» [PC] Henry Stauff is the main antagonist, who keeps popping up and mocking the player.



» [PC] The iconic entrance hall is the first thing you see as you enter – this is where your bizarre adventure begins.



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:**
VIRGIN
INTERACTIVE
- » **DEVELOPER:**
TRILOBYTE
- » **RELEASED:**
JUNE 1993
- » **PLATFORM:**
PC, CD-I
- » **GENRE:**
ADVENTURE



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE 11TH HOUR

SYSTEM: PC

YEAR: 1995

TENDER LOVING CARE (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: PC

YEAR: 1998

QUAKE 3 ARENA

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

YEAR: 1999

own little two-man department within the company, which we made 'official' by printing up business cards identifying ourselves as VPs of New Technologies, and taking them to industry conferences focussing on 'multimedia'. Graeme and I were the only ones from the games industry to attend the conferences. You could recognise us as the ones not wearing suits."

At these conferences, the pair quickly noticed something. "Rob and I went to a conference in New York City and saw a lot of presentations about CD-ROM, mainly touting the size of the dictionary and the patentable 'fast search' – but nothing about graphics or video or games! We found that a little confusing," Graeme tells us. "At the airport we had a genuine napkin moment where we wrote down 'puzzles, clue, Twin Peaks'. We went back to the office and started to work on a word document called GUEST, and over the next few days hammered out a four-page overview of a game that centred on a haunted house with puzzles that used the CD-ROM medium. We handed it to our boss at around 10am in the morning and by lunchtime we had a verbal agreement on a contract to start a new company to make this game. Thus was born Trilobyte." – that was at the end of 1990.

In addition to Graeme and Rob, there were two other people working out of the Jacksonville, Oregon office. Robert Stein III was *The 7th Guest's* 3D graphic designer and horror writer Matthew Costello planned to turn the napkin idea into a chilling plot. Matthew was already an established writer of horror stories such as *Beneath Still Waters* and *Darkborn*, whom Rob met online through the GEnie Network. The company's most important employee joined in the spring of 1991: Autodesk's 3D Studio rendering software. Robert Stein had been one of the beta testers of this tool and was very familiar with it. As a demonstration of what it could do, he created a sort of living room in which the camera panned from a fireplace to chairs and tables



» [PC] The game is full of creepy moments – like the ghostly hands trying to reach through a picture.



» [PC] The technology and low resolution of the time meant that there were fuzzy edges around all the figures – so they were simply redefined as ghosts.



Graeme Devine

■ Graeme was the lead programmer on *The 7th Guest*. After the demise of Trilobyte, he had stints at id Software and Ensemble Studios before becoming a freelance game developer and teaching game design/programming at Santa Cruz's the University Of California.



Rob Landeros

■ Rob was the lead game designer and art director on *The 7th Guest*. After Trilobyte, he founded Aftermath Media and created the interactive film *Tender Loving Care*. He relaunched Trilobyte in 2010 and continues to oversee the games and their re-releases.

» [PC] The graphics of *The 7th Guest* were nothing short of spectacular in 1993.



► floating ghostly in the air – something that knocked Graeme and Rob's socks off thoroughly, whereupon they immediately threw their existing design plans in the bin.

The original plan was for the game to consist of still images with puzzles being solved within them. The second idea was to film the entire game and run it as an interactive video. Not far from the Trilobyte office was the Nunan House – a pompous mansion built in 1892 by local mining magnate Jeremiah Nunan and used as a tourist attraction and hotel. Graeme and Rob would place cameras on tripods in regular intervals to capture 360-degree images, which the player could then click through to solve puzzles embedded in the images. Then Robert Stein and 3D Studio became part of Trilobyte which, according to Graeme, changed everything, "At first we

were not going to do so much rendering, just the puzzles. Then we did the stair test and a turn test on the stairs and it looked gorgeous – so we decided to go all in. I reverse-engineered the FLC format and that got the attention of Autodesk, so they gave us a lot of free licences, which helped a lot."

The first public presentation of *The 7th Guest* took place at the 1992 Summer CES (Consumer Electronics Show) in Chicago and, according to Graeme, was never actually planned. "Rob and I went to CES in Vegas with an early build of the game to show Martin. This is about a year into development. We showed him on the booth in a meeting room and he immediately

"SHIT, NOW WE'VE REALLY GOT TO DO THIS!"

Graeme Devine

wanted to show it on the floor." This demo immediately attracted a stunned crowd – including Roberta Williams, who was so

overwhelmed by the demo that she took off again, only to return a few minutes later with some of her developers, pointing at the monitor and shouting, "I told you it was possible and you wouldn't believe me!"

The thing is: it wasn't real, because the demo shown there wasn't on a CD. Well, there was a CD playing – but according to Rob, it was a movie soundtrack by Danny Elfman, which suited the mood of the demo very well, and made the LED on the CD drive light up regularly, giving the impression that the game was getting its data from there. But it wasn't, the demo was running from the hard drive. For Graeme and Rob, this meant that they now had to somehow deliver what they had promised, "The 'Best Of CES' accolades started to fly and the game industry started to buzz about this 'impossible' game," recalls Graeme. "I remember sitting on the plane back to Oregon, Rob next to me, and looking at him – and we both kind of said, 'Shit, now we've really got to do this.'"

The 7th Guest was scheduled for release on Halloween 1992, but was delayed until April 1993 in the US and June of that year in the UK. Due to the long development time, *The 7th Guest* cost a lot more than planned – the original budget was \$400,000, but in the end about \$650,000 was spent. According to Graeme, the first print run of around 80,000 copies sold out on the very first day, and by the end of 1993 more than 450,000 copies of *The 7th Guest* had been sold.



» [PC] Six guests came to the party, none left – who is the mysterious seventh guest?



» [PC] The puzzles have very little to do with the plot or their environment.



» [PC] You can always check the map to see which rooms still have unsolved puzzles waiting for you.

So what did buyers get for their £70 (equivalent to about £150 today)? For starters, a fairly simple plot about a sadistic toy maker called Henry Stauf who invites six guests to his house for some riddle solving – but who is the mysterious seventh guest that nobody knows about? Much more importantly, the graphics were simply spectacular for the time, the rooms you move through here look like real rooms: exquisitely designed bedrooms and bathrooms, elegant staircases and colourful mosaics, cosy upholstered furniture and individual book spines in the library – it was simply unimaginable in 1993!

And then there were real people moving around the house. Or rather ghosts, although this was due to the technology of the time: chroma-keying wasn't as easy as it is today – which meant that there was always a fuzzy area around the actors filmed against a blue paper wall, which Graeme just couldn't get rid of. This was the reason for turning the characters into transparent ghosts, so their mysterious appearance at least made some sense. Graeme and Rob grabbed some actors from the Southern Oregon Theatre Association and filmed away. The whole shoot took just two days and cost around \$24,000. The fact that most of the actors were non-professionals is reflected in the dramatic overacting. But this has also to do with the technology used. Because of the low resolution of

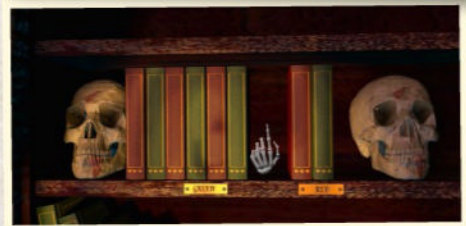
The 8th, 9th & 10th Guest

WHAT FOLLOWED THE 7TH GUEST

■ A sequel to *The 7th Guest* was sort of announced in the credits of the first game – because it was called *The 7th Guest, Vol I* there. And according to Graeme, development of *The 11th Hour* actually began while work on *The 7th Guest* was still in full swing. A 'more of the same' quick-release was planned, which would have been in the shops in March 1994. But then Trilobyte's ambitions got the better of it. Much more sophisticated filming and lots of modern technology meant that *The 11th Hour* was not released until November 1995, on four CDs and costing \$11 million – but it only sold around 500,000 copies.

But that was far from the end: there was a spin-off called *Uncle Henry's Mindblower*, which bundled 13 of the well-known puzzles without FMV ballast around it as a quick lunchtime brainteaser on one disc for a small price – and is said to have sold less than 300 copies worldwide, although Graeme denies this figure. There was also a quasi-sequel called *Clandestiny*, which added comic art from South Korea to the 3D rendered graphics, but remained the same in terms of content – and also flopped. Just like Rob's pet project, the enormously elaborate interactive psychological thriller *Tender Loving Care*.

The 7th Guest Part III: The Collector was also planned, as was a sequel called *The 13th Soul* from Legend Entertainment, but neither project ever came to fruition. Unlike *The 13th Doll*: a fan project that, after successful Kickstarter funding, was released on Halloween 2019 with the official blessing of Trilobyte, essentially following the original game seamlessly.



My Mind Is Blowing!

THE 7TH GUEST'S MOST NOTORIOUS PUZZLE

■ *The 7th Guest* is full of puzzles, some of them very obscure – but none more infamous than the microscope puzzle. The basic premise is quite simple: you are looking at a petri dish full of blue and green microbes on a chequered board – the blue ones are under your control, the green ones are managed by the computer. Through constant movement and division, you must ensure that your units outnumber the others. The aim is to conquer as much of the board as possible and wipe out as many green cells as possible.

Unfortunately, this is much easier said than done, as the AI is absurdly powerful! In fact, it's so good that even the developers couldn't cope with it and made this the only optional puzzle in the game. The official strategy guide for *The 7th Guest* (see right) has this to say about it, "It is not necessary to beat this game to advance through *The 7th Guest*, and you will not be missing anything if you can't beat it. To our knowledge, nobody has a consistent strategy to beat this game, not even Graeme!" – but you don't get this hint in the game!

Incidentally, this puzzle was based on the 1990 game *Spot*, which Graeme Devine and Robert Stein developed in just six weeks for Virgin Mastertronic, and which was a variation on the 1988 board game *Ataxx*.



Puzzle #14

Blow of Infection

OBJECTIVE: You control the blue cells. Stauf controls the green ones. The object is to capture the majority of the territory and wipe out as many green cells as you can.

Moves: Cells can split in two in any direction. They can also jump over a space, but they do not duplicate when they do. If a cell comes in contact with any cell of another color, that cell will change to match the color of the one that moved.

This is not strictly a puzzle, but a game based on the artificial intelligence in the game *Spot* also created by Graeme Devine. The game is set at a pretty high level of difficulty at the beginning. Each time you return to the Library and read the book of hints, the AI of the Microscope game will decrease a little until, on the third visit to the Library, the puzzle will be solved for you.

Note: It is not necessary to beat this game to advance through the Seventh Guest, and you will not be missing anything if you can't beat it. To our knowledge, nobody has a consistent strategy to beat this game, not even Graeme! If anyone has been able to develop a consistent, repeatable strategy, send us a note.

One thing the computer (Stauf) will not do is move into an area of two empty spaces surrounded by other cells. This is obvious because then you could move into the remaining space and grab all those cells! Perhaps there's a strategy that makes use of this.

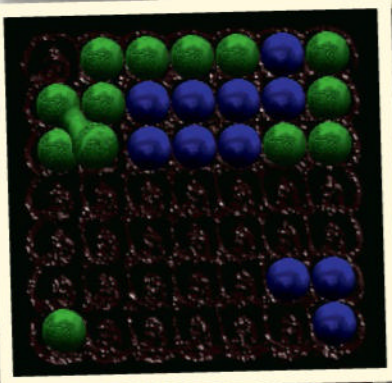
Puzzle # 15

Take a Note

OBJECTIVE: Repeat each note Stauf plays. The song consists of 18 notes.

Solution

Unless you are a musician, you may want to try taping a piece of paper to your screen. Number the keys 1,2,3...18 as they're played.



This game can be infectious. If your blue blood cells are effective, they should outnumber my green viruses by mutation in the end.



» [PC] *The 7th Guest* is full of bizarre challenges – but the Can puzzle is one of the most frustrating obstacles.

► the footage, it was very difficult to convey emotion through facial expressions alone, even in SVGA, so everything had to be exaggerated for full effect.

As well as the stunning visuals, the game's simple controls stood out. The only thing you control here is the cursor icon, which adapts to the environment. Usually it is a softly animated skeleton hand – if it lures you in, you can walk in that direction. If it's wagging its finger, you can't do a certain action. And when it becomes a pulsating brain, a puzzle awaits. This grey mass was Rob's introduction to the wonderful world of 3D animation. "When we started, we only had DPaint and not even Photoshop," he tells us. "The discovery of Autodesk 3D Studio changed everything. Once we decided to 3D render the rooms, the navigation and the puzzles, most issues were solved. I still remember that for the animated cursor icons I spent a couple of days trying to make them the old-fashioned way as a series of sprites. It wasn't until the third day that it dawned on me that I could simply build them in 3D and animate them too. The first one I made was the skull with the shifty eyes and throbbing brain. 3D studio came with a few meshes, one of which was a human skull. So I merely lopped off the top, quickly made a brain and eyeballs and by the end of the day had that one finished."

In terms of content, *The 7th Guest* offered far less spectacle, with only 22 brainteasers: chess problems, word riddles or number puzzles. The whole thing wasn't exactly new, Rob cites Cliff Johnson's 1987 release *The Fool's Errand* as a major inspiration. "I was an avid reader of *Games Magazine*. I loved working my way through each issue solving logic and word puzzles. *The Fool's Errand* was like an issue of *Games Magazine* with its variety of puzzles, but all being held together by a theme and a meta puzzle goal – each puzzle solved rewarded the player with a piece of a jigsaw puzzle map that led the Fool to his destination." The only problem is that some puzzles are ridiculously easy (like dividing a spooky cake into six equal pieces), while others are virtually impossible – see the My Mind Is Blowing! panel. Another notorious



» [PC] The videos look crude and blurred today, but at the time they made for an unbelievable atmosphere.



challenge is the Can puzzle. Located in the mansion's kitchen is a shelf containing 33 cans, each with a single letter on it, all consonants, plus Y as a vowel. You have to swap cans to end up with the following sentence SHY GYPSY SLYLY SPRYLY TRYST BY MY CRYPT. It's a riddle that neither Graeme nor Rob choose to take responsibility for. "I believe Matthew Costello is the source of that puzzle," Graeme says. "He was the editor of a puzzle magazine for many years as well as a novelist, so I'm not sure if it was in his head or not."

This style over substance approach did not go unnoticed by the press at the time. Paul Presley, for example, called the game, "Technically OK, but disappointingly weak in gameplay and far too expensive" in the fourth issue of *PC Zone*. The game's resounding success, however, made sequels a no-brainer – more on this in The 8th, 9th & 10th Guest panel. *The 7th Guest* appeared in a very solid conversion on Philips' unfortunate CD-i system, and was also supposed to be released on other CD consoles of the time, such as the 3DO and Commodore's CDTV. There were even plans



» [PC] Each character has a different motivation for being in the house – as you solve the puzzles, you learn more about them.

"WHEN I LOOK BACK UPON IT, I AM AMAZED THAT WE HAD THE ENERGY AND IMAGINATION AND TIME TO DO IT ALL"

Rob Landeros

for a version for Nintendo's CD add-on for the SNES, with the Big N even snatching up the game rights for a million US dollars – but none of this ever happened.

For all its flaws, *The 7th Guest* is an important pioneer in the field of PC gaming. It was the first big success for the fledgling CD-ROM format, it paved the way for the 3D Studio craze of the mid-Nineties and it ensured that gamers bought SVGA cards, 16-bit sound cards and fast 486 processors in droves to get the full multimedia experience. Graeme and Rob have gone their separate ways over the years, but both look back fondly on their first SVGA baby. "I would say that *The 7th Guest* still holds up in terms of its simple, intuitive interface," offers Rob. "The music is still as effective and fun as ever. The puzzles remain just as challenging. The ubiquitous aural presence of Stauf as a mostly unseen avatar guiding you through the puzzles as well as taunting and haunting you, remains an effective invention. When I look back upon it, I am amazed that we had the energy and imagination and time to do it all."

Graeme agrees with Rob's assessment, telling us, "It's a game that people still write to me about all the time to this day that they played growing up. It got some people into programming, into game design, or just got their family together around a mouse and a computer screen. The fact that people still remember and write to me and say, 'Hey *The 7th Guest*, that's what got me interested in coding' or, 'I played that with my big brother growing up and it scared the heck out me' That's why *The 7th Guest* is important." ✨

VR Makeover

HOW THE 7TH GUEST HAS BEEN UPDATED FOR VIRTUAL REALITY

■ After wowing gamers in the Nineties, *The 7th Guest* is now hoping to pull the same trick in the VR space. Although it's only licensed from Trilobyte and doesn't involve the game's original creators, it's obvious that Vertigo Games is a big fan of the original.

From the moment you find yourself on a small boat with only a paddle to get you to shore, it's obvious that this is a new take on the popular game. You'll still be solving puzzles and you'll still meet a selection of eccentric guests, but puzzles and plotlines won't necessarily play out as you'd expect.

Puzzles have been massively overhauled to make use of the benefits that VR can bring, meaning that *The 7th Guest* now feels like an elaborate set of Escape Rooms to solve as you manipulate objects and try to work out how to solve each task. Luckily, you're now equipped with a useful lantern to help navigate your way through the gloomy rooms of the mansion.

The controls can sometimes be a bit finicky, but overall they work really well and there's plenty of comfort controls to keep VR sickness at bay. Blessed with some stunning presentation and clever puzzle design, *The 7th Guest VR* feels just as exciting and immersive as the 1993 original did.



» [PC] *The 7th Guest VR* uses volumetric video and the results are excellent.



» [PC] *The 7th Guest VR* will immerse you in its puzzles like never before.



Harmful Park

THE PRICE IS JUST AS DEADLY

» RETROREVIEWAL



» PLAYSTATION » 1997 » SKY THINK SYSTEM

I've always wanted to own *Harmful Park*. I first heard about it in the mid-Noughties and by then it was already rising in price. In fact, it was so expensive that I gave up on ever owning it and instead opted for a digital copy via the Japanese PS3 online store. Sadly, when Sony got hacked, I lost my password details and couldn't reactivate my account, meaning I lost *Harmful Park* and several other pricey Japanese exclusives.

Over the years I convinced myself that Sky Think System's game wasn't all that, but that was largely because the price had sailed past the £500 mark. Never say never though, because in 2023 I went to the London Gaming Market and sold a decent portion of my collection (about 250 games). After putting cash aside for holidays and various other family related things I put aside what I had left and sold a few extra high-end Saturn items including *Steam-Heart's* and *Terra Cresta 3D*. The former is a dull shooter with Hentai elements (don't judge me), while the latter bizarrely features no actual scoring system.

All of a sudden this stupidly rare game I had desired for so long was finally obtainable and I started scouring eBay and various shmup forums for a copy. By sheer luck, a fellow shmup fan was selling off their entire collection as they were moving to Japan, so I purchased *Harmful Park* along with *Konami Antiques MSX Collection Ultra Pack* for the Saturn for £550 from them. Admittedly, it's a silly amount of money to pay for a couple of games, but as it had come from trades I never considered it a monetary purchase.

Is *Harmful Park* worth the money it goes for? Absolutely not in my opinion, but over the last few years I've started to realise that quality is better than quantity and I'm perfectly happy to sell off even 30 games if it will allow me to obtain one which would be typically out of reach. Now, I wonder what *Gaea Seed: Project Trap* currently sells for... ★



ULTIMATE GUIDE

ICO

THERE WERE NO GAMES ON THE PLAYSTATION 2 QUITE LIKE ICO. DESIGNED WITH A DELIBERATELY UNDERSTATED BEAUTY, IT WOULD LATER HAVE A MASSIVE INFLUENCE ON MODERN GAME DESIGNERS, SOME OF WHOM WE HEAR FROM HERE AS WE DELVE DEEP INTO FUMITO UEDA'S WONDERFULLY ATMOSPHERIC DEBUT

Words By **Graham Pembrey**

Near the beginning of *Ico* you find yourself leaping across a broken bridge before gesturing to your companion – a ghostly, glowing girl named Yorda – to take a leap of faith

and join you. When she hesitantly jumps but falls short, you reach out and haul her away from the deep chasm below to safety. The scene plays out like an impressive setpiece on first encounter. But you soon discover there are many surprising, dramatic moments like this on the paths *Ico* leads you down, giving the experience a cinematic feel that stood out in the PlayStation 2 era and feels more akin to modern game design when you play it today.

That *Ico* has influenced the creation of some huge contemporary games is in no doubt. *Dark Souls* auteur Hidetaka Miyazaki described *Ico* as, “The game that changed my life,” while *The Last Of Us* creator Neil Druckman called it, “A source of inspiration and my favourite game of all time.” It’s often celebrated as an exemplar of minimalist design, offering very little dialogue, no health meter and no immersion-breaking guidance on how to play. You’ll also find that every object you come across as you explore the atmospheric

castle is there for a reason. The environmental storytelling and subtle puzzles are held up as part of what made the game so quietly special.

Given this important legacy and the ambitious design that made *Ico* so impactful, it’s amazing to think it began development as a game for the original PlayStation with its relatively constrained hardware capabilities.

Director and lead designer Fumito Ueda conceived of the concept in 1997 and began realising his vision with producer Kenji Kaido

one year later as part of a team within Sony Interactive Entertainment’s Japan Studio that would become known as Team Ico. The team worked by

creating “concept movies” they could use to demonstrate their vision for the look and feel of the game, before building these cinematic demos into interactive experiences. Late in 1999, they decided to shift development to the PlayStation 2 to overcome technical barriers and get closer to their goal.

Ueda and Kaido took a “subtracting design” approach to making *Ico*, to use their own words from a Game Developers Conference presentation in 2004. Part of this was removing any unnecessary clutter in the user interface and the castle environment. In



» [PlayStation 2] After freeing Yorda from a cage, your aim is to escape the castle together.



» [PlayStation 2] Many puzzles involve working out how to reach new areas.

**“I LOVED THE SENSE OF
ATMOSPHERE IN ICO”**
Jordan Mechner



» [PlayStation 2] The nimble shadow creatures will swiftly dodge your attacks.

INSPIRED BY ICO

GAMING LEGENDS PAY TRIBUTE TO UEDA'S MASTERPIECE

■ *Prince Of Persia*, *Another World* and *Flashback* are among the games Fumito Ueda has credited in interviews as inspirations for *Ico* and his overall approach to game design. For *Prince Of Persia* creator Jordan Mechner, the influence is a circular one that helped shape the modern sequels to his original Apple II classic. "*Ico* was an important inspiration for the team and me on *Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time* – both in the relationship between the prince and Farah, and the structure of the palace as a coherent, unified space where all the levels fit together," Jordan tells us. "I loved the sense of atmosphere in *Ico*, the feeling of solitude and of exploring a dangerous space with one person for company. I'm a fan of Ueda's work, so it makes me very happy to hear that the original *Prince Of Persia* was an inspiration for him as well."

Another notable fan is Raúl Rubio Munárriz, the CEO and cofounder at Tequila Works who was lead designer for the acclaimed puzzle game *RiME*. "Fumito Ueda combines art and design with grace," Raúl tells us. "Not many designers can pull an environmental context like Ueda-san, and not many artists manage it to make so much sense for the player at the same time. The influence of Fumito Ueda over an entire generation of developers cannot be denied. And I am no exception."

On meeting Ueda in Barcelona, Raúl was pleased to discover there was mutual appreciation. "I'm a big fan of *Ico* and *Shadow Of The Colossus*, but I did not expect the master to be a fan of *RiME*! He had not just played it but had finished it, and he had so many questions about its animation and the role of Enu and Nana, our heroes. Of course, I explained that our inspiration had been the same as in his own work: not just Giorgio de Chirico and his surrealist architecture but how *Ico* and *Yorda* felt so fragile and helpless. How they seem incomplete when they are away from each other, yet unstoppable when they are together."

For Raúl, the influence is an ongoing one that will shine through in the next Tequila Works game. "That feeling of partnership and 'two-in-one' were a defining part of *RiME*, *Song Of Nunu* and our upcoming project," he reveals.



» Jordan Mechner is an artist, novelist and game designer whose creations include *Prince Of Persia* and *Karateka*.

» Raúl Rubio Munárriz is CEO at Spanish developer Tequila Works and his works include *RiME* and *Song Of Nunu*.



THE GREAT ESCAPE

HOW TO HELP
YORDA AND FLEE
THE CASTLE



KEEP CLOSE

■ If you stray too far from Yorda for too long, shadow creatures will always materialise and snatch her. Unless you get back to her in time, she'll be pulled into the darkness. Stay close and be quick if a puzzle requires you to leave her alone.



BE OBSERVANT

■ The writer Anton Chekhov famously advised that a gun should only be mentioned in a story if it's eventually fired. *Ico* follows a similar principle – anything that stands out in your surroundings, from cracks in bridges to uneven flooring, will be there for a reason.



FIGHT FAST

■ The combat mechanics in *Ico* could not be simpler. There's one button to lash out with your staff or sword, and mashing said button is often quite effective. Try beating enemies into a corner, particularly bigger beasts which will knock you to the ground if given the chance.

UPDATING ICO

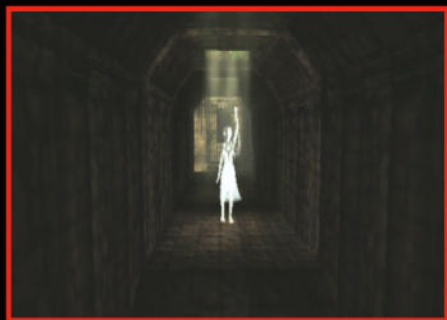
HOW A REMASTER ENHANCED THE EXPERIENCE

■ A decade after the original release of *Ico*, a high-definition remaster from Bluepoint Games – a studio known for specialising in remasters and remakes, from *Metal Gear Solid* to *Demon's Souls* – arrived on the PlayStation 3. Also included was a remaster of *Shadow Of The Colossus*.

Both games retain their core gameplay with no changes, but graphical and audio improvements bring extra fluidity and polish that enhances the original. One such change is the introduction of stereoscopic 3D graphics to give a greater perception of depth as you explore the large environs of the castle. Although he was not directly involved in crafting the update, Fumito Ueda has spoken highly of Bluepoint for its work, and it's not surprising that the studio was later commissioned to take on the 2018 remake of *Shadow Of The Colossus*.

If you're interested in picking up a physical copy of the PlayStation 3 collection, there are plenty of variations to discover. Look for *Ico & Shadow Of The Colossus Classics HD* for the PAL release or *The Ico & Shadow Of The Colossus Collection* for the North American one. In Japan the two remasters were published as individual releases. You can also currently play both remasters on the PlayStation Plus service for more recent Sony machines.





WATCH YORDA

■ Stuck in an area and unsure where to turn next? Stand still for a while and watch what Yorda does. After some time, she will often gesture towards a point of interest, or wander close to the place where you should turn your attention.



TAKE FIVE

■ Save points in *Ico* take the form of glowing stone benches scattered around the castle. Just take a seat and wait for Yorda to join you. The game may have a gentle vibe, but you'll see the game over screen plenty, so save your progress regularly.



» [PlayStation 2] Can you dash back to Yorda before she's pulled into the black hole?



» [PlayStation 2] Every area ends with a set of stone gates only Yorda can open.



» [PlayStation 2] Yorda's mother, dark queen of the castle, has grounded her in ruthless fashion.

► accordance with that philosophy, controlling your boy-with-horns protagonist is simple. You can run, jump and hang from or shuffle along ledges in movements reminiscent of one of Ueda's cited influences, *Prince Of Persia*. You can take Yorda by the hand and pull her alongside you in what is really the crux of the gameplay: leading her through the castle that imprisons her and solving puzzles while in search of a way out. At the same time, you'll strive to keep her safe from shadow creatures that emerge intermittently from black holes in the ground, by fending them off frantically with a wooden staff (or later in the game, a sword) while heaving Yorda back to safety when they drag her down into the shadows.

The AI that guides Yorda was impressive for 2001. The same button that links hands with her will yell out to her when you're standing far away, encouraging her to run closer. You'll learn to read her body language and the tone of her

"THE INFLUENCE OF FUMITO UEDA OVER AN ENTIRE GENERATION OF DEVELOPERS CANNOT BE DENIED"

Raul Rubio Muratiz

voice, from cries for help to refusals to budge when you ask her to leap down towards you from too great a height. There's a tactile feel to your connection

with her as you coordinate to solve puzzles and move into new areas together. You can easily understand why developers like Jenova Chen (*Journey*) and Josef Fares (*Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons* and *It Takes Two*) have said this partnership dynamic influenced the cooperative aspects of their games.

As you progress through the castle, what first appeared to be a linear environment begins to branch out into an intricate web of interconnected areas. Puzzles also become more challenging, from the earlier switching of levers and pushing of boxes onto tiles that open doors, to more elaborate ones where you'll use bombs to explode bridges and clamber up the moving sails of a windmill.

The story progresses with an important cutscene when you first reach a huge gate leading out of the castle. Yorda's mother, the dark queen keeping her imprisoned, appears and warns you to give up your quest. After exploring two symmetrical sides of the castle and powering beams of light onto both halves of the gate, you and Yorda eventually manage to open it and break free. But a few more twists in the tale follow before a challenging showdown with the queen marks the culmination of the adventure. Just make sure to hang on until after the credits roll for one last playable section with a final surprise that makes up part of the ending. ►



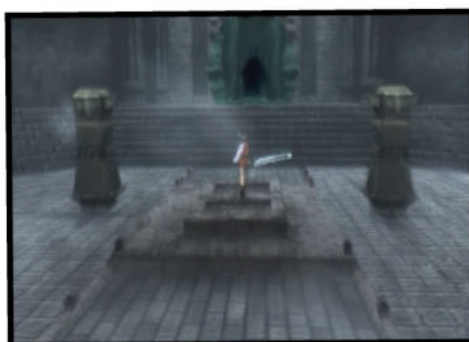
» [PlayStation 2] Your journey through the castle includes a mix of bright and gloomy settings.



» [PlayStation 2] Ico and Yorda rarely speak, but you'll see their bond grow throughout the game.



» [PlayStation 2] There's a real verticality to *Ico's* level design.



» [PlayStation 2] The final showdown with the queen is tough, so be sure to save before it starts.

► There are some important differences to note between the US version of *Ico* and the slightly later Japanese and European releases. With a tighter September 2001 release schedule to hit, the American edition launched without several bonus features and improvements that would be added to the later versions (which arrived in December 2001 for Japan and March 2002 for Europe). These changes included small refinements to certain puzzles and improvements to architecture within the castle. They also include incentives to start a second playthrough.

Added bonuses on your second attempt in these versions include the ability to play the game with a second player controlling Yorda, and translations of her (very occasional) speech appearing on the screen. The more graceful cover art of the later releases was also drawn by Ueda himself, depicting Ico and Yorda in the style that Ueda has said was inspired by Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico.

Despite earning critical acclaim on release, *Ico* failed to bring huge financial success for Sony. Sales were modest, and particularly so in the US. Nonetheless, Sony's confidence in

"NOT MANY DESIGNERS CAN PULL AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT LIKE UEDA-SAN"
Ray Rubio Mundariz

the game was clearly strong enough for Team Ico to be given the green light to plan a follow-up, which would lead to *Shadow Of The Colossus* and then *The Last Guardian* years

later. Cumulatively the trio of closely connected games have become widely celebrated and left the elusive Ueda with a towering reputation in the games industry as an artistic visionary.

If any of this has tempted you to return to Ueda's debut creation, perhaps the easiest way to do so today is through the more polished, high-definition PlayStation 3 remaster (see the Updating *Ico* panel). At the time of writing, you can access that version on a PlayStation 4 or 5 using the PlayStation Plus service. Equally though, if you have a chance to experience the PlayStation 2 version, there's something quite special about enjoying how innovative it was on the original hardware. Whichever way you manage to play the game, we would recommend turning up the volume; the soundtrack by Japanese composer Michiru Oshima adds greatly to the atmosphere.

Titled *Melody In The Mist*, it was remastered and re-released by Sony in 2021 to mark the game's 20th anniversary – a milestone made more remarkable by just how contemporary the design of the game still feels. ★

AFTER ICO

EXPLORING THE ACCLAIMED SUCCESSORS

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

■ Fumito Ueda initially planned *Shadow Of The Colossus* as an online multiplayer game. The working title was *NICO*, a play on 'Ico 2', with 'ni' being the pronunciation of 'two' in Japanese. Eventually it evolved into a single-player adventure in which you roam a desolate landscape hunting colossi, giant beings you must climb and destroy. First released on PlayStation 2 in 2005, it was remastered first for PlayStation 3 and then fully remade for the PlayStation 4 in 2018 by Bluepoint Games.



THE LAST GUARDIAN

■ After a troubled development spanning nine years, during which time Ueda and Team Ico left Sony to form GenDesign, *The Last Guardian* continued the legacy of *Ico* on PlayStation 4. Playing as a young boy, you partner with a massive bird-like creature named Trico who responds to your commands as you move through ruins solving puzzles. It contains some stunning, moving scenes as you and Trico work together. It made several Game Of The Year lists, despite some critics complaining about performance issues.



Hardware Heaven

DS Lite

» **MANUFACTURER:** Nintendo » **YEAR:** 2006
» **COST:** £99.99 (launch), £20+ (today, boxed), £15+ (today, unboxed)

Fine and functional though it was, it always felt like the original model of the DS never fully satisfied Nintendo, at least in terms of its looks. The system's final design wasn't ready for its public unveiling at E3 2004, and was confirmed just a few months ahead of launch. As a result, a new model was announced in January 2006, just 14 months into the platform's lifespan – the earliest point at which Nintendo had redesigned one of its consoles. The DS Lite launched in March in Japan and June in other territories.

The DS Lite is slightly smaller and lighter than the original model, with brighter LCD backlights, with the only notable downside being the awkward way that Game Boy Advance cartridges protrude from the smaller chassis. The minimalist, glossy casing drew comparisons to the fashionable design of contemporary Apple products such as the iPod. The DS Lite was persistently sold out in Japan during 2006 and 2007 and became enormously successful, with sales of over 93 million units making it the most common model of the console. ★

DS Lite fact

■ The DS Lite's sales peak was October–December 2007, when 11.04 million consoles were sold. The best-selling DS game is *New Super Mario Bros.*, with 30.8 million copies sold.

PROCESSORS: 32-BIT ARM9 (133 MHZ), 32-BIT ARM7 (33 MHZ)

GRAPHICS: TWO 256X192 RESOLUTION DISPLAYS, TWO 2D ENGINES (FOUR BACKGROUND LAYERS, 128 SPRITES PER FRAME), 3D ENGINE (UP TO 122,880 POLYGONS PER SECOND)

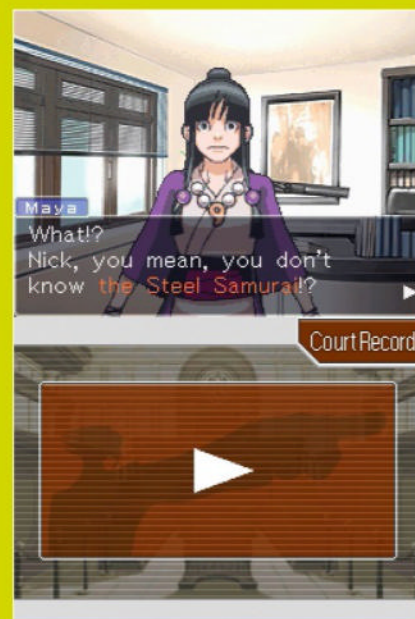
MEDIA: NINTENDO DS GAME CARD (UP TO 512MB), GAME BOY ADVANCE CARTRIDGE (UP TO 32MB)

POWER: 1000 MAH RECHARGEABLE LITHIUM ION BATTERY (APPROX. 15-19 HOURS PLAY)

AUDIO: 16 STEREO PCM/ADPCM CHANNELS

RAM: 4MB





ESSENTIAL GAME

Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney

The quirky nature and immense popularity of the DS hardware gave publishers confidence to try ideas that would have previously been unthinkable. The *Ace Attorney* series is a great beneficiary of that phenomenon, with the original Game Boy Advance versions having been released in Japan only. The game itself is a fantastic point-and-click adventure, in which you gather evidence to clear your clients of murder charges and uncover the true culprits in the process. If you like it, there are three sequels and two spin-offs on the DS alone.



RICHARD BROWNE

A BBC conversion led to a wild ride in the 1990s, when Richard hopped between the publishers Domark, Psygnosis, Philips Media and MicroProse, working on games like *Hard Drivin'*, *Microcosm* and *Mech Commander*

Words by Lewis Packwood

Richard's career began with a BBC Micro conversion of *Mega Apocalypse* for Martech, and soon he landed a job as a project manager at Domark. That led to a stint as a designer in Psygnosis' secretive Advanced Technology Group, before Richard was lured back to Domark in 1994. After just a year, he moved again to Philips Media to become director of product development, but when the firm was taken over by Infogrames in 1997, he relocated to the States to become a producer at MicroProse. In the Noughties, he was vice president at Universal Interactive, then THQ, and most recently he was head of external projects at *Warframe* developer Digital Extremes between 2018 and 2023. He now runs the consultancy Blue Moon Production Company.



» Back in March 2023, Richard gave a talk at the Reboot Develop Blue conference in Dubrovnik.

How did you get into the games industry?

I think I was about 16, and there was a thing in *Commodore User* magazine: send in your high score on these Commodore 64 games and you can come and playtest this game up in London. So I sent in my high scores, and they called me up. It was *Mega Apocalypse*, which Simon Nicol had written, and Simon was there. So I started chatting with him, and when we got to the end of the day, I said if you need anyone to help out, give us a shout. And so I actually spent most of that summer down in Brighton playtesting *Mega Apocalypse*.

How did you end up converting *Mega Apocalypse* to the BBC Micro?

I'd been working at school with a guy called Russell Bradshaw, and I was like, "We could do a BBC Micro conversion of this. I'll do the graphics and sound, and you code it." So I called Simon, and he asked Dave Martin, who ran the publisher Martech. So at 16, I had my first contract.

Then you worked on *Computer Maniac's 1989 Diary*, right?

I got a phone call from Dave Martin, and he said, "I've got a real problem. I need a BBC version of *Computer Maniac's Diary* done in three weeks. Can you do it?" It was this crappy, interactive diary thing that they'd done for a book club. So I went down to WHSmith that afternoon, bought the Commodore 64 version, took it home, and went, "Yeah, I can do this, no problem." Martech, who at the time were having financial issues, had done this deal with Domark, so John Kavanagh from Domark became my project manager. I knocked this thing out in three weeks by working through the night – I had a BBC downstairs and a BBC upstairs and was basically working on both, and Russell did some code for me as well. I got 1,000 quid for that. Although there's a story around getting that 1,000 quid out of Dave Martin.

What happened?

After having not got my cheque from Martech – I'd been calling and calling, and getting no reply – I drove down to Hove where Martech was based. I sat in my car outside the office, and Dave came and got into his posh BMW, and I went and knocked on the window and said, "Hi Dave, I'm here for my 1,000 quid." And he was like, "I can't pay you right now, but it's OK, Domark will pay." So he got on his car phone, and he phoned Jeremy Bard at Domark, who was their CFO. So I drove from Brighton to London, and went to the Domark offices for the first time, and got my cheque. Then about a month later, John Kavanagh called me up and said, "Do you want to work for me?"

What did you do at Domark?

I went to work in Domark's offices as a software assistant to John, which involved mastering games and playtesting, and doing customer returns, and answering the phones. People would send in their ideas or their demos for games, and I had to write replies to them. One of those games was an Amstrad CPC 464 cassette of a football management game that we absolutely fell in love with. So we wrote back to the kid who sent it in and said, "This is great, but it's in BASIC. But keep it up and send us a new version." So about six months later, we got an Atari ST disk and we were completely addicted to it – and that was *Championship Manager*.

How did you graduate from answering the phones?

It was myself, John and a guy called Andy Blazdell, who left to set up the adventure game company Divide By Zero, and then formed CelAction, who are the people who do the technology behind *Peppa Pig* and *Bluey*. When Andy left I got promoted to being a project manager, so that meant getting in my little

A middle-aged man with a grey beard and hair, wearing a black t-shirt, is sitting on a boat. He is holding a white mug in his right hand and looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a lush green forest on a hillside, with a body of water and a small boat visible in the distance. The boat has a dark railing with gold-colored accents.

“I went and knocked on the window and said, ‘Hi Dave, I’m here for my 1,000 quid’”

Richard Browne

» Richard relaxes on a boat going down the Lijiang River during a visit to Tencent in China in September 2023.



SELECTED TIMELINE

- MEGA APOCALYPSE [1988] BBC MICRO
- COMPUTER MANIAC'S DIARY [1989] BBC MICRO
- HARD DRIVIN' [1989] ATARI ST/AMIGA
- RACE DRIVIN' [1991] ATARI ST/AMIGA/DOS
- PIT-FIGHTER [1991] AMIGA/VARIOUS
- SHADOWLANDS [1992] AMIGA/ATARI ST/DOS
- AQUAVENTURA [1992] AMIGA
- WIZ 'N' LIZ [1993] MEGA DRIVE
- INNOCENT UNTIL CAUGHT [1993] DOS
- MICROCOSM [1993] FMTOWNS
- NOVASTORM [1994] FMTOWNS
- EXSTATICA [1994] DOS
- SUPER DROPZONE [1994] SNES
- THE ORION CONSPIRACY [1995] DOS
- THE DAME WAS LOADED [1996] DOS
- MECH COMMANDER [1998] PC
- THE NEXT TETRIS [1999] PC
- STARSHIP TROOPERS: TERRAN ASCENDANCY [2000] PC
- WOODY WOODPECKER RACING [2000] PS1
- BANJO-KAZOOIE: GRUNTY'S REVENGE [2003] GBA
- WARHAMMER 40000: FIRE WARRIOR [2003] PC
- IT'S MR PANTS [2004] GBA
- SABRE WULF [2004] GBA
- WARHAMMER 40000: DAWN OF WAR [2004] PC
- FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR [2004] XBOX/PC/PS2
- COMPANY OF HEROES [2006] PC
- TITAN QUEST [2006] PC
- SUPREME COMMANDER [2007] PC
- CONAN [2007] PS3/XBOX 360
- DE BLOB [2008] Wii
- WORLD OF ZOO [2009] PC/WII/DS
- DARKSIDERS [2010] PS3/XBOX 360
- WAYFINDER [2023] PC/PS4/PS5



» [BBC Micro] *Mega Apocalypse* was one of Richard's earliest games and saw him supplying the graphics.



» Richard (left) in conversation while hosting a roundtable at DICE 2022.



» [Amiga] *Hard Drivin'* was one of the many titles Richard was involved with while working at Domark.

► Peugeot and driving around the whole of England looking after developers. We were doing all these arcade conversions, so my job was to go around there and sit on them and get them to finish the damn things. My project management skills basically involved bringing tea and biscuits.

John went off to set up The Kremlin, as it was called, which was Domark's internal development group, and so I was left running external development for Domark for the last year I was there.

Was Domark a good company to work for?

They were fabulous. Dominic and Mark were as outrageous as the press made them out. The number of times I slept on the couch at Domark because Dominic would walk into the management meeting on a Friday afternoon with three bottles of wine and just put them on the table, and was like, "We're not leaving until those are done."

How did you end up moving to Psygnosis?

There was a PCW show, I think it was September 1990. I went over to the Psygnosis booth to buy a copy of *Shadow Of The Beast*. I pick up a copy and give it to this bloke behind the counter, and that was Jonathan Ellis, who was the managing director of Psygnosis. And Jonathan's like, "Do you work for Domark?" And I'm like, "Yes, I do,

I'm a project manager." And he's like, "Oh, Ian [Hetherington]'s looking for some project managers, just go and see him."

So the next day I went over to see Ian in this meeting room just off the show floor, and he showed me the fractal engine demo, as it was called, running on an FM Towns. And my mind was completely blown away by what I was seeing. So I moved up to Liverpool and went to work for Psygnosis – and it was like going from the Dark Ages into this whole new modern thing.

Did you go straight into Psygnosis' Advanced Technology Group?

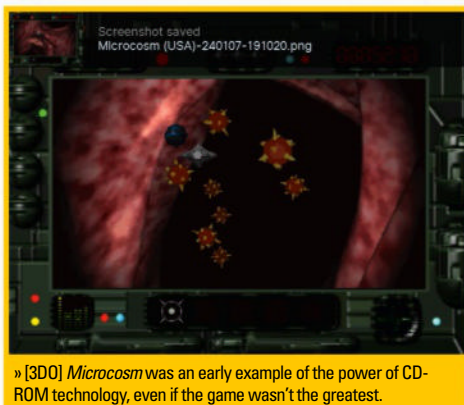
Not straight away. There was literally a door in the office that had a key combination on that you could not get into unless you knew it. The first thing was they set me up to get *Aquaventura* and *Shadow Of The Beast* finished. And then I proved myself, and was given the combination to the Advanced Technology Group, so I was invited into the hallowed halls of our CD-ROM development. A guy called David Worrell ran it. John Gibson and Graham 'Kenny' Everett, who were Denton Designs back in the day, they were the lead programming guys, and then Jim Bowers and Neil Thompson were the two art leads. I was brought in to do design, and hence the *Star Wars* CD-ROM game came up.

What was the *Star Wars* game?

They had been tinkering away with this deal with Lucasfilm. So Dave and I basically worked on a design doc to do a CD-ROM *Star Wars* game, and worked our asses off all the way till Christmas. There was a meeting set up for CES in January, and before CES, Jonathan and Ian were supposed to go and see Lucas at the ranch and sign the deal. Jim had been working on getting a Stormtrooper animated and running, and we had that on a demo tape. And the day before the meeting, they got a phone call from Lucas saying the deal's off.

What happened?

When I was at THQ, I worked for Jack Sorenson, who ran production at Lucas at the time, and



» [3DO] *Microcosm* was an early example of the power of CD-ROM technology, even if the game wasn't the greatest.



» Richard writing his first BBC Micro games back in 1987.

IN THE CHAIR: RICHARD BROWNE

“We were doing all these arcade conversions, so my job was to go around there and sit on them and get them to finish the damn things”

Richard Browne

Kelly Flock who ran the business side, and they both swear to me that it was too expensive. That was their story. Jonathan and Ian's story was always that George had basically told them that they couldn't have some poxy little developer in Liverpool doing state-of-the-art CD-ROM development, they had to do it internally.

And that was when you began work on *Microcosm*?

Ian Greave, who ran our business development, got on the phone to Fujitsu and said our CD-ROM team is now not going to be doing the *Star Wars* thing, but we have this original idea. And so Fujitsu said, we have this thing called the FM Towns Marty coming out next year, and we need games for it. We set up a whole new office down the road from our Harrington office and got loads of SGIs [Silicon Graphics workstations] in there and built a team of about 13-14 people, which at the time was a big team for a game. And we worked

our asses off for about eight, nine months to get that game done. I was producing it, designing it, writing the scripts, doing the storyboarding.

How did Sony come on the scene?

There was a lot of interest in Psygnosis, and Jonathan and Ian had been looking for how we could grow, and we needed money. EA wanted to buy us, and then the discussions with Sony started. The Nintendo PlayStation was still a thing, and so we did a *Star Wars* demo for that.

Oh, tell us more about that.

DMA actually did it. We had this Super NES with a cartridge that was THIS big [gestures with hands] to emulate CD-ROM playback. We'd done a load of rendering stuff for *Star Wars*, and then we just digitised footage. It was just because it was a fun thing to do, not because there was any chance of the licence at that point.

Was Sony still working with Nintendo at this stage?

I think they were still working with Nintendo

at the very beginning, but I think that they also knew that it was likely to go off the rails, and they made the decision that they were going to build the PlayStation themselves. What they really wanted out of Psygnosis early on was actually a distribution network. But on the development side, I think we got either the second or the third PSX.

What do you remember about that first PlayStation development kit?

This huge, hulking, photocopier-like box arrived in the ATG one day. Everything was in Japanese, so we had to figure out what the hell was going on. We were trying to figure out what to connect it to, and when we talked to the Sony guys, they said, "Well, you need a NEWS workstation." And we were like, "What the fuck is a NEWS workstation?" And so we went hunting, and eventually in a Sony store in Basingstoke, we found three.

That sounds like it would have been a bit limiting.

We said to [Ken] Kutaragi, you cannot send



RICHARD'S PICKS 5 games Richard was involved with



MEGA APOCALYPSE

■ Richard won a competition in *Commodore User* where the prize was to play Simon Nicol's C64 shoot-'em-up *Mega Apocalypse* ahead of release. He ended up playtesting the game, and then converting it to the BBC Micro with help from Russell Bradshaw in 1988.



HARD DRIVIN'

■ Domark published the Amiga and Atari ST ports of *Hard Drivin'*, and Richard worked on the graphics while Jürgen Friedrich did the programming. Getting the game out in time for Christmas 1989 involved many late nights and a mad dash to the disk duplicators.



MICROCOSM

■ A product of Psygnosis' Advanced Technology Group, *Microcosm* featured cutting-edge graphics. Richard worked on the story, which borrowed from the movies *Fantastic Voyage* and *Inner Space*, and sees a tiny ship being piloted through a human body.



NOVASTORM

■ While other members of the team took time off to recuperate after the brutal crunch period on *Microcosm*, Richard worked on a demo for what would become *Novastorm*, also known as *Scavenger 4*. Like *Microcosm*, it's a rail shooter set against cinematic backdrops.



MECH COMMANDER

■ Richard's first job when he joined MicroProse as a producer in 1997 was to get *Mech Commander* onto shop shelves by June the following year – otherwise there was a risk the publisher would go bankrupt. Despite the stress, he still regards it as one of his favourite games.



► out a dev kit that requires a Sony NEWS workstation to operate when you can't find any. You need a PC dev kit. So Andy Beveridge and Martin Day [from SN Systems] started taking Psy-Q, as it was called, and translating that to the PlayStation. At CES 1994, we showed Kutaragi the dev system running on the PC for the first time. And from that point Psygnosis controlled all the dev kits for every Western developer, which set up a bit of a head to head with Sony Computer Entertainment Of America. All of our developers were the first people to get the PC dev kit. We could only build so many, and lots of them went to Europe and not that many came to the States. That's the reason that all the European launch titles were better than the US ones.

How did you end up rejoining Domark in 1994?

At that point, I wanted to go and live in London again. And as it happened, Domark called me and said, we have no idea about the CD-ROM stuff, we need somebody who understands it. We need to transition from cartridges because we're losing so much money, will you come back and work for us? So Ian Livingstone and I came

in to get Domark out of cartridges and into CD-ROM.

Wasn't Domark working on the VR version of *The Sentinel*?

We had this deal, 30 grand apiece to do two games for Virtuality. And I was a huge fan of *The Sentinel*, so we went up to Geoff Crammond's house and licensed the rights for *The Sentinel* in VR. But we hadn't even started on it by the time Ian, Dominic, Mark and myself sat down and went, I'm not sure what we can do for 30 grand, even with a game design already there. *Fighting Fantasy* was going to be the other one. We just decided it wasn't worth it and gave them their money back.

Then after a year, you left for Philips Media.

Dave McElhatten asked me to come to Philips, and I was like, "CD-i, no." And he was like, "Look, we want to build a PC, PlayStation, Saturn dev team, and we want to get rid of CD-i. I need you to come and kill it and convince people within Philips that there's no hope." I was literally brought in to be the antichrist of CD-i.

You worked with Jon Ritman's studio Cranberry Source, what happened there?

We published *QAD: Quintessential Art Of Destruction*, which was the first part of a three-product deal with them. It wasn't that successful, but it did OK. A *Match Day* game [*Super Match Soccer*] was going to be the second title, which eventually came out through Acclaim. And then *Redemption* was the third title.

Redemption was going to be an isometric, *Head Over Heels* thing but with 3D sections where you had shooting. It was a very ambitious game, but it was very early in development, which is why I think when Infogrames took over Philips Media, they just went, "No, just get rid of it."

So tell us what happened after the Infogrames takeover.

I ended up at MicroProse in Alameda in California,



» "My two Psygnosis CD babies, *Microcosm* and *Scavenger 4*," says Richard. *Scavenger 4* would be released as *Novastorm* on other platforms.

“Things were getting really dicey, and then this weird thing happened where we suddenly got told that Hasbro were going to buy us. We were like, 'What? Where the hell is the link there?'”

Richard Browne

basically running all their external development. *Mech Commander* was due to come out in June that year, and Rob Sears, who was my boss, said, "Look, if we don't get it out in June, there's a good chance the company's going to collapse." First day on the job! So the first thing I do is get on a plane to Chicago and go see FASA Interactive, and they were like, "It's not coming out unless we think it's great" – because FASA didn't really need the money. So there was lots of working my charm and magic, and we did eventually get *Mech Commander* out, and it was awesome. One of my favourite games ever.

MicroProse got bought by Hasbro, what was that like?

There was a lot going on. We ended up signing a company called Blue Tongue to do a *Starship Troopers* game, because our internal *Starship Troopers* game was a complete clusterfuck. That was the problem: we had an internal team that was not performing terribly great. *Starship Troopers* had hit a wall, *Falcon 4.0* was just a fucking nightmare and going on forever. So it was basically the external stuff that was keeping us alive. Things were getting really dicey, and then this weird thing happened where we suddenly got told that Hasbro were going to buy us. We were like, "What? Where the hell is the link there?" But at the same time, Hasbro was starting to dabble in more serious games: like they bought *Wizards Of The Coast* and *Avalon*



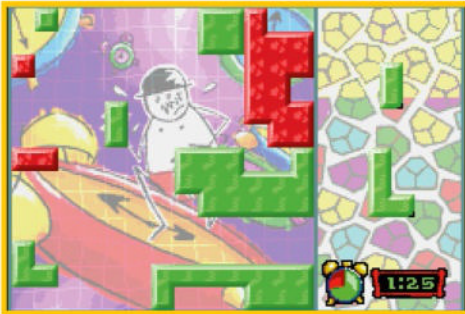
» Richard on the backlot at Universal Studios in 2001 during his tenure at Universal Interactive.

DRIVE TIME

Hard Drivin' in real life

■ Richard recalls a hairy moment in 1989 when he was under pressure to deliver the Amiga and Atari ST conversions of *Hard Drivin'* in time for Christmas. Richard, development manager John Kavanagh and programmer Jürgen Friedrich had been working around the clock at Domark's London offices to get it finished. "Our disk replicator was in Bradford," Richard recalls. "So Jürgen literally popped the disks out of the drives on the Amiga and the ST and gave them to me, and I got in my car and drove up the M1. I hadn't slept in like two days. And I vividly remember waking up on the M1 as I went over the rumble strip because I'd fallen asleep. I got off at a service station – coffee, cigarettes, Coke – then straight back out and got to Bradford. I gave them the disks and then napped in the car while they put the protection on it and mastered it, and then came back in to test it before they started replicating tens of thousands of these things."





» [Game Boy Advance] Richard worked at Rare on several GBA games, including *It's Mr. Pants* and *Sabre Wulf*.

Hill. So we suddenly ended up with a new boss, Tom Dusenberry, and I used to have to fly to Beverly, Massachusetts, and show what we were doing. I ended up looking after *The Next Tetris*, which was being done by Henk Rogers and his company Blue Planet. But near the height of the dot-com boom, Tom had bought games.com as a URL.

What happened with that?

Kevin Ray, who was our tech director, started playing around with what we could do on the internet with games.com. I transitioned out of MicroProse to being games.com, and we started setting up what was going to be the home of games on the internet. Hasbro owned all the Atari games licences, and we had this incredibly smart programmer who started writing all the Atari stuff in Java. We had an anti-hack system and everything. We were all going to get lots of shares in the company, and we were going to IPO it, separate to Hasbro.

What went wrong?

One day, Kevin came in and said, "They're taking it back, and they're going to control games.com from Beverly, and we're not going to IPO." So we had this meeting at GDC in 2000 at the Fairmont Hotel where Tom came in and said this is what we're doing with games.com. And everyone bailed. And bizarrely, I walked out of that meeting room and into the lobby of the Fairmont, where I saw Jim Wilson, who had been head of marketing in the kids and family group at Philips Media in America, and who was now the president of Universal Interactive. Two weeks after that meeting, I was working for Universal Interactive down in LA.

What was Universal like?

They'd been incredibly successful because of *Crash [Bandicoot]* and *Spyro*. But there were a lot of people within the company going, "Why have we got this games division that does nothing but original stuff?". Because they spent all their time trying to licence their IP to other people. It's like, well, if we've got an internal games division, why aren't they doing it? So that was the thrust when I joined, it was like, let's start using our own IP. Insomniac and Naughty Dog had both gone to Sony at this point. And



» [PC] Richard worked as director and was involved in product development for *Titan Quest*.

then we were doing *The Mummy* with Rebellion, and we were doing *The Grinch* with what is now Behaviour, and we were doing this *Bruce Lee* game for the Xbox launch with a company called Ronin. And then *Jurassic Park*.

Were you in touch with the filmmakers?

We went down to Stan Winston's workshop and got the maquettes and started working directly with them. We had a Consumer Products Group at Universal and everything was supposed to be channelled through them, but we started going around them because we needed to know stuff.

Universal owned the *Spyro* IP, but why didn't it get Insomniac to do the PS2 game?

We had this *Spyro* game going on with companies called Check Six and Equinox: one was the art studio and one was the coding studio. And it was a fucking disaster. I mean, the PlayStation 2 was really difficult. Meanwhile, Insomniac were working on stuff with Sony that became *Ratchet & Clank*, and being brilliant as they are, had mastered the PS2.

So [Insomniac founder] Ted Price came over and had lunch with me one day, and he said, "Look, we still love *Spyro*, and we still want to do *Spyro*. We're working on this thing with Sony, but we have some more resources, and we think we can run two teams simultaneously. So if you want us to do *Spyro*, we'll do *Spyro*." And I'm like, hallelujah, thank god, because this other project was not going well. So I went into Jim [Wilson]'s office and said, "Jim, stop the press, Insomniac will do *Spyro* for us!" And he's like, "No." I'm like, "What? Why would you not want the guys who did the PS1 versions of *Spyro* to do the PS2 versions of *Spyro* when they're so brilliant at it?" and he's like, "I'm not paying that royalty." Ted wanted a very decent royalty on doing *Spyro* PS2, and Jim's like, "I'm not gonna pay it." And I'm like, "But we'll sell ten times as much!" That was the first of our little splinters that led to my demise at Universal. Then I nearly went to run Bungie, that was fun.

We were going to say that we should probably wrap it up, but now we want to hear about Bungie!

I'll tell you that next time! ★

HOLLYWOOD IN MICROCOSM

The game that had Richard up all night

■ Richard worked on the story for *Microcosm*, as well as appearing in the game's snazzy FMV intro alongside other members of the development team – like artist Paul Franklin, who went on to form the visual effects company Double Negative, and won the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects for Christopher Nolan's *Inception* and *Interstellar*.

But back in the early Nineties, things were a bit more scrappy. "We had no blinds in the office," recalls Richard. "And we couldn't film in daylight because there was too much light coming in, so we had to film from, like, eight o'clock at night to three in the morning." They used a rented video camera, and filmed the actors running on a treadmill against a blue screen, although "I think we actually got a white sheet," says Richard. "Then we realised [...] how do we actually get the blue screen off the characters? But we had this incredible programmer called Stewart Sargaison, who sat down and in a day and a half wrote an application on the Mac to pull the blue screen out of this stuff."

It was a huge effort to get *Microcosm* finished, involving months of late nights. "We were all young," says Richard. "I was 21, 22 at the time, and we were working every hour god sends. We were sleeping under the desk. I used to actually drive home at certain points during the day or the night to shower and come back again. It was a crazy time. We all wanted this thing to be the greatest thing ever. And so we finished that, and then I crashed my Toyota MR2."

Was that connected? "Yeah, we hadn't slept much," says Richard, in an echo of the *Hard Drivin'* story from a few years earlier. "I was actually driving from the main office to go and see the Fujitsu guys, and I was driving through the car park and went over a hump, and there was some black ice. I span and hit a raised flower bed. That was bad times." Don't crunch and drive, kids.



Skies Of Arcadia

IT'S FINALLY TIME TO LAND

» RETROREVIEWAL



» DREAMCAST » 2000 » OVERWORKS

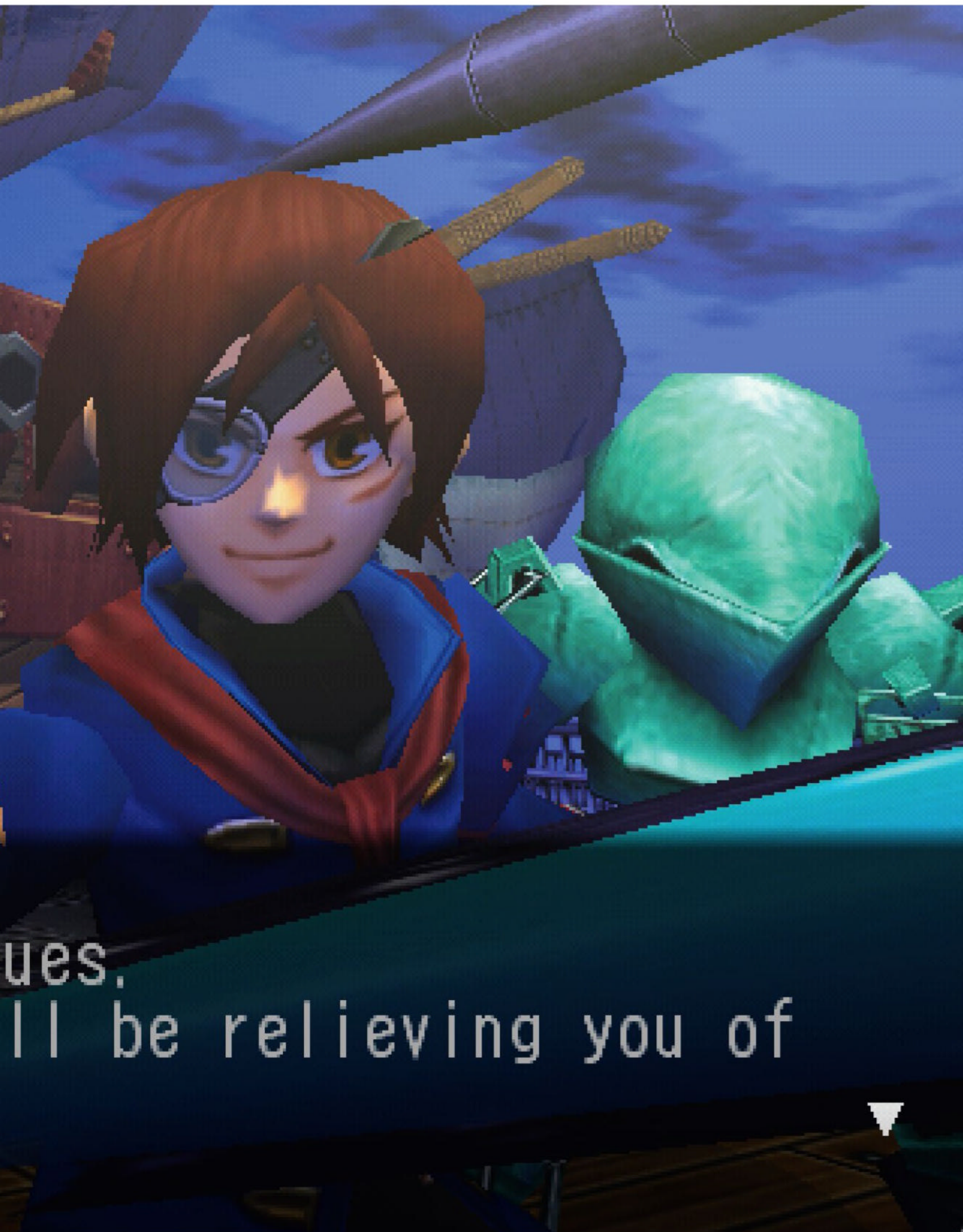
I love *Skies Of Arcadia*. Whenever I play *Valkyria Chronicles*, I put Vyse and Aika in my team just because I love the fact that the developers put that reference in the game. When I play *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed*, the *Skies Of Arcadia* track Rogue's Landing is one of my absolute favourites – I love the way the track is blasted out from beneath you for the final lap, leaving you to fly among the ships as the battle rages, and the music is exceptional. Yes, I love *Skies Of Arcadia* – or rather, I love the characters and the setting, because the truth is that I don't have any experience with the actual game they come from.

You may be wondering how I've ended up not playing one of the Dreamcast's most prominent RPGs, given how passionate I am about the console. The truth is somewhat mundane – I just never came across a copy in the wild when I was younger. By the time I could more easily head online and buy it, I was going through a phase where I wasn't playing many RPGs because of the time commitment involved, and frustration over the genre's mechanics. What's more, the price had risen high enough that I had second thoughts about taking the plunge, and I just found myself passing it up time and again as a result.

I've decided that 2024 is the year I stop dithering and finally right this wrong. The price is now high enough to give me pause for thought about a game of any genre, but I've found myself much more inclined towards RPGs over the last few years. If I can make dozens upon dozens of hours for an RPG I had no clue about like *Blue Reflection: Second Light*, I can surely find the time to play arguably the best Dreamcast game I've never played – even if it is decades late. ✨

《Vyse》

I'm Vyse of the Blue Rog
And in a few minutes, I'
all your valuables!



ues.
I'll be relieving you of



RETRO RATED



» This month we run the RetroTink 4K through its paces, play through Ubisoft's Prince Of Persia reboot, go on a shooting spree with some Toaplan classics and dig through the new Monty Mole collection



» [RetroTink 4K] While 720p content from Xbox 360 and PS3 can look great, the latter requires a way to bypass its HDCP.

RetroTink 4K

AN UPSCALER WITHOUT EQUAL

INFORMATION

- » RELEASED: OUT NOW
- » PRICE: \$750
- » PUBLISHER: RETROTINK
- » DEVELOPER: RETROTINK
- » BUY IT FROM: RETROTINK.COM



As much as we love CRTs, they're not easy to store or maintain. As a

result many have turned to modern TVs to play their retro systems, only to find that the image quality isn't to their liking or their TVs don't have suitable inputs for their classic systems. This is where upscalers like the Open Source Scan Converter, Framemeister and RetroTink come in handy and all have their own strengths and weaknesses. The latest offering is Mike Chi's RetroTink 4K and it's easily the



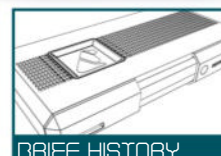
» [RetroTink 4K] *Dead Or Alive 4* looks exceptional when it's running via the RetroTink 4K.



most impressive upscaler yet, but that quality certainly isn't cheap.

Clocking in at an eye-watering \$750 (that's before postage and custom charges) the RetroTink 4K is a premium product that won't be for everyone. If you can justify the cost of entry, you'll most likely never need another upscaler, because this is a mind-blowing follow-up to the superb RetroTink-5X. Thanks to an exhaustive amount of testing from within the community, the RetroTink 4K is an exceptional piece of kit and should only get better with time as more updates and profiles are released.

In addition to all the 5X's inputs (component, scart, composite and S-Video) the 4K also includes



BRIEF HISTORY

» Mike Chi has been continually improving his range of RetroTink upscalers for a while now and the RetroTink 4K is the latest evolution to arrive on the rapidly expanding market. While the 2X Scart and Comp2RGB are long out of circulation, the 2X, 5X and RGB2Comp are all currently available, but not as feature heavy as the RetroTink 4K.



» The price is high, but what you're getting for your money is an exceptional device.

* PICKS OF THE MONTH



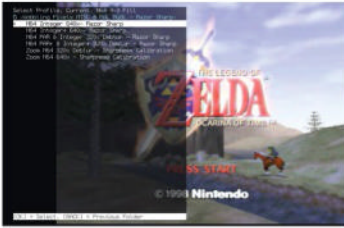
DARRAN

Batsugun
Bitwave Games' PC ports haven't disappointed so far and *Batsugun* remains an absolute banger of a shmup.



NICK

Prince Of Persia: The Lost Crown
The Metroidvania template may be well worn, but it's a great fit for the series – it's stunning that Ubisoft hasn't tried it before.



» [RetroTink 4K] There's already an exceptional number of profiles, with more on the way.



» [RetroTink 4K] The RetroTink 4K can handle a staggering array of inputs as you can see here.



» [RetroTink 4K] While it's geared towards classic consoles, systems like the Switch greatly benefit from the RetroTink 4K's upscaling abilities.

HD15/VGA and HDMI 2.0, meaning it will play a staggering number of systems. We're particularly impressed with the HDMI output as it now means 720p PS3 and Xbox 360 games look absolutely fantastic when upscaled (just be aware you'll need a HDCP stripper to play the PS3 this way).

The system itself is a joy to navigate thanks to a much cleaner interface than the 5X, while its new controller gives you access to important options at the touch of a button. While you can adjust parameters of the image to your heart's content, many will be interested in the numerous console profiles and TV masks that have been created by the likes of Wobbling Pixels and FinalbrandX. Simply select Profile, load the desired system found on the included SD card and the RetroTink 4K does the rest.

Most systems look impressive right out of the box, but using profiles, particularly the masks, can make your modern TV look like an old-school CRT, it really is phenomenal stuff. This is mainly due to the increased 4K resolution and implementation

of true HDR which means the upscaler can do an amazing job of emulating the phosphors of old TVs. The inclusion of HDR is particularly useful as it counteracts the darkness that accompanies scanlines. Another huge benefit the RetroTink 4K has over its predecessor is Auto-Cropping and Auto-Resolution Detection, the former instantly and perfectly scales the image to fill your screen, while the latter adjusts to a game's resolution on the fly so it will always look as sharp as possible.

Creating new profiles of your own is also incredibly easy and all profiles can be saved to 1 of 12 presets, which you can again access with a simple button press. Unlike the 5X, there's currently no way to rename these profiles without using a PC, which is a little irksome.

The Advanced Settings is where you'll do most of your tweaking and the included parameters are intensive, but never bewildering. Scaling/Cropping lets you tweak any image without any loss in pixel clarity, Processing/Effects is where you can play around with interpolation, scanlines and

masks, while Color Correction offers plenty of options for fine tuning. New to the RetroTink 4K is Black Frame Insertion that will make images even smoother, while the Deinterlacer/Film Mode options will be a godsend for those that like to use consoles with interlaced images like the PlayStation 2 and want to watch films on VHS or Laserdisc. While many swear about the benefits of using Motion Adaptive for systems like the PS2, we actually preferred the new CRT Simulation mode, although we noticed a wobbling image when our PS2 was emitting a 50Hz signal.

While the RetroTink 4K is obviously geared towards older systems it also does a phenomenal job with HDMI-based consoles like the Switch as well as the aforementioned Xbox 360 and PS3. It's even possible to use decimation to rescale the image so you can add scanlines to these modern games. The power architecture inside the RetroTink

4K means it can pretty much handle any task you give it.

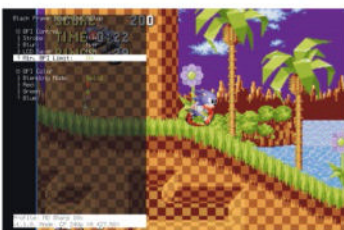
For all its brilliance, the RetroTink 4K isn't perfect. Being unable to easily rename profiles is a nuisance, we've had a couple of issues where the menu froze, requiring a reset, and the most recent update required us to use a brand-new SD card. There's also no escaping its lofty price. For many, the RetroTink-5X and similar upscalers will be a much cheaper alternative while offering similar benefits. If you can justify the extra cost and want your old games to look as good as possible, then the RetroTink 4K is currently the best gaming upscaler we've encountered. Miss it at your peril. ★

In a nutshell

The cost of entry is certainly high, but it's hard to see how anyone is going to top Mike Chi's game-changing upscaler anytime soon. It really is quite something.



» [RetroTink 4K] You can tweak scanlines as much as you like, or do without them entirely.



» [RetroTink 4K] Black Frame Insertion will make games like *Sonic The Hedgehog* smoother.



» [RetroTink 4K] As well as supporting 8-Ch LCPM or compressed surround via HDMI, the sample rate can also be boosted – it's great for Mega Drive games.



* PICK OF THE MONTH

Prince Of Persia: The Lost Crown

A REVIVAL FIT FOR ROYALTY

INFORMATION

- » **FORMAT:** SWITCH
- » **ALSO ON:** PS4, PS5, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES X/S, PC
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £44.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT MONTPELLIER
- » **PLAYERS:** 1



» [Switch] There are plenty of twists and turns before the plot reaches its conclusion.

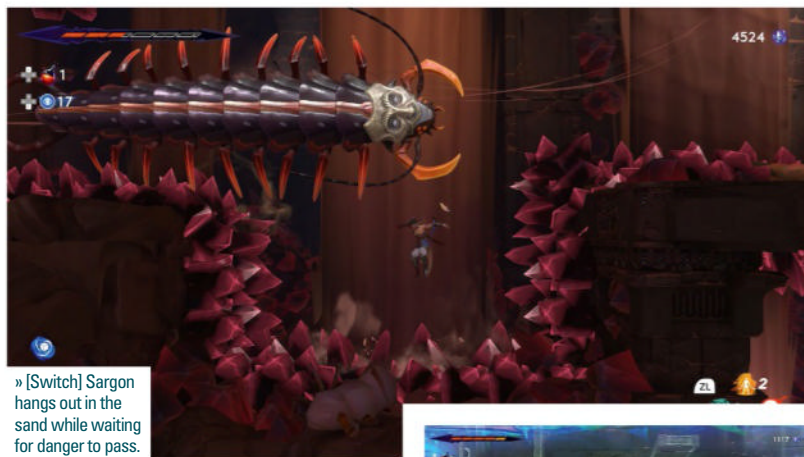


We've not seen a major *Prince Of Persia* game since *The Forgotten Sands* way back in 2010,

but it's fair to say that the reveal of this comeback generated some mixed reactions – the adoption of the *Metroidvania* format wasn't to everyone's tastes, with some fans insisting that it feels like a step back from the 3D adventures of the *Sands Of Time* era. However, Ubisoft's direction for the game has turned out to be inspired.

You take on the role of Sargon, a member of an elite band of warriors in pursuit of the kidnapped Prince Ghassan. However, they discover Mount Qaf to be cursed, with time acting in some decidedly odd ways. You know what happens next – plenty of platforming and a slathering of swordplay, with new abilities gained along the way opening up both new traversal options and additional combat possibilities.

The game design isn't especially innovative, but it's top-notch throughout. Sargon has plenty of fighting moves and the enemies challenge you to use them, with even regular grunts capable of taking you out, so combat is always interesting. Platforming sections can get pretty tough, demanding that you string together plenty of difficult moves before returning to safety, but the hardest parts are generally optional. Sargon's abilities are quite interesting too, with some unusual abilities like a way of returning to a previous position. There's plenty to see and do

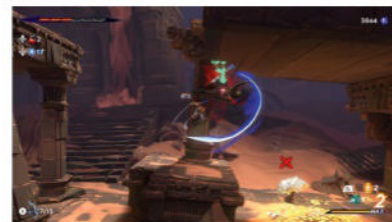


» [Switch] Sargon hangs out in the sand while waiting for danger to pass.

here – our first run took 22 hours and ended with just 74% completion. It never feels overwhelming, because you can pin screenshots to the already detailed map to ensure that you always know exactly what stopped your progress in a particular place. There are also difficulty sliders, allowing you fairly fine adjustments to cater for your strengths in combat and platforming respectively.

Graphically, the game prioritises performance over detail but still manages to look nice thanks to some striking environment design and stylised, semi-cartoonish characters. The Switch version of the game is ambitious in aiming for a full 1080p, 60fps target in docked mode and while it doesn't hit it all the time, it does so often enough to make the effort worthwhile.

We don't have many complaints, but we did notice a couple of progress-



» [Switch] Sargon is equally adept at fighting on the ground or in the air.



related bugs – revisiting an early area triggered a previously seen cutscene to play again, and we once saw tutorial text telling us how to use an ability we had yet to gain. Other than those technical hitches, it might have been nice to have a few more fast travel points dotted around the fairly massive map, but that's really it.

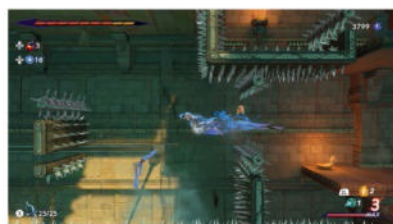
The *Metroidvania* style has gone from being a rare treat to a favoured approach to platform games, and it's easy to get a 'been there, done that' feeling from them lately. However, we never felt bored with *Prince Of Persia: The Lost Crown*. In fact, our play sessions only tended to end when a depleted battery in the console or controller forced us to take a break, and that speaks volumes about how much we enjoyed it. *

In a nutshell

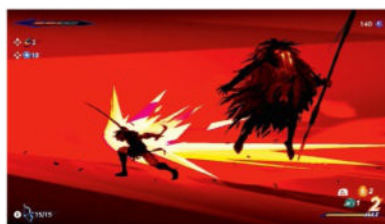
Not only a well-executed revival of one of the classic series, but one of the finest platform games of its kind and Ubisoft's best game in recent memory.



Score **92%**



» [Switch] Sargon is a joy to control, and abilities like the Air Dash only add to the fun.



» [Switch] Parrying certain moves allows Sargon to pull off some very stylish executions.

* PICK OF THE MONTH

Another Code: Recollection

» System: Switch » Buy it for: £49.99 » Buy it from: eShop, retail



Adventure game aficionados with a fondness for Nintendo may remember the *Another Code* games.

The DS original came out in 2005 and followed teenager Ashley Mizuki Robins as she ventured to the mysterious Blood Edward Island after an invitation from her long-missing father, and the 2009 Wii sequel saw her seeking to uncover the truth behind her mother's death. *Another Code: Recollection* sees the two remade and presented together, though you must play the first story to access the second.

Plenty of work has gone into remaking these games, and they now feel rather different. The top-down and side-on views of the original games have been replaced with fully 3D, over-the-shoulder exploration. The appealing cartoon-style visuals also extend to the dialogue sequences, with animated 3D models replacing the static images of old. Familiar musical themes have been rearranged and while the overall plots remain intact, some details have been added and changed.

The puzzles have also been completely changed. This makes sense as the originals relied heavily on the distinctive control characteristics of the DS and Wii, and some would require awkward compromises to work on the Switch. This is great for newcomers, but while old fans will have something new to experience, it's hard not to notice the loss of some of the features that set the games apart from adventures on more conventional platforms.

Difficulty is fairly gentle across both the games, so seasoned fans of the genre will likely breeze through the puzzles. Still, the tales of deceit, murder and the power of memory are intriguing enough to draw you in, and Ashley is certainly a likeable enough protagonist. This is a fine way to experience her story but you may wish to try the original games on the quirkier Nintendo platforms instead, to find out just what made them worth remaking in the first place.

>>

Score **78%**



» [Switch] The brand-new 3D environments are very pleasant to look at and explore.



» [Switch] Puzzles have changed, and all avoid the touchscreen in case you're playing docked.



The Monty Mole Collection

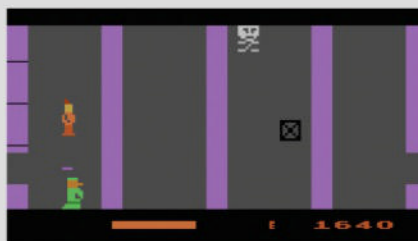
» System: Switch » Buy it for: £6.99
» Buy it from: Online

Fans of Gremlin's iconic mole should be more than happy with this new collection. While it's incredibly bare in terms of its presentation and lacks *Monty Is Innocent* and *Impossamole*, it's still decent value. *Sam Stoat Safe-Breaker* is the weakest game, which leaves two versions of *Wanted! Monty Mole*, *Monty On The Run*, *Auf Wiedersehen Monty* and *Moley Christmas* to enjoy. One nice touch is that both C64 and ZX Spectrum versions of most games are included, along with two difficulty levels. The ability to create save points and rewind is useful, but the screen-sizing options, filters, lack of CPC versions and the inability to fully customise controls do bring the overall package down somewhat.

DARRAN JONES

>>

Score **71%**



Dark Chambers

» System: Atari 2600 » Buy it for: \$59.99
» Buy it from: atari.com

Dark Chambers was originally released in 1988, and is back with a brand-new cover illustration by Brazilian artist Butcher Billy. It's very much like *Gauntlet* as it shares a common ancestor, the Atari 8-bit game *Dandy*, and involves exploring a maze with 26 levels while grabbing a bunch of treasure and fighting dangerous ghouls – many of which spawn from generators. It's technically very advanced for the hardware, with smooth animation and scrolling stages, but it's also a tad easy as it's quite slow and you'll never find yourself overwhelmed by enemies. Fortunately, *Dark Chambers* does support two players simultaneously so you can rope a friend in for some dungeon-crawling fun.

NICK THORPE

>>

Score **70%**



Toaplan Arcade Shoot'em Up Collection Vol 3

» System: PC
» Buy it for: £16.59 (£6.69 separately)
» Buy it from: steampowered.com/gog.com

The latest quartet of blasters from Bitwave Games continues to raid Toaplan's excellent back catalogue. This is the developer's most esoteric selection so far and includes *Tiger Heli*, Toaplan's very first shmup, the incredible *Batsugun*, the progenitor of the bullet hell subgenre and two more obscure gems: *FixEight* and *Vimana*. As you'd expect, the amount of options on offer is staggering with a host of tweakable display modes, the ability to practice any aspect of a game, regional variations, online leaderboards, rewind options and a whole lot more. The end result is another excellent offering from Bitwave Games.

DARRAN JONES

>>

Score **90%**

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE>



<!-- THE GATE OF MOONRAH, FROM THE ARCADE (LEFT), THE REMASTER (MIDDLE) AND THE ORIGINAL C64 VERSION (RIGHT).-->



<!-- [C64] A BANK OF SPRITES INCLUDING SOME OF THE BOSSES.-->



<!-- FISTS OF FURY FROM BOSS BASHTAR - C64 (TOP), ARCADE (MIDDLE), AND REMASTER (BOTTOM).-->

<INTRO> MODERN GAMES GET REMASTERED, SO IT IS INTERESTING TO SEE ONE OF MY FAVOURITE C64 ARCADE CONVERSIONS GETTING THE SAME TREATMENT IN OUR MAIN FEATURE. ELSEWHERE, WE SAVE THE PROCESSORS IN DATA MAN, CAST MORE SPELLS WITH THE BRILEY WITCH CHRONICLES SEQUEL, PLOT TACTICS WITH THE STRIFE SISTERS ON PC ENGINE, ESCAPE A 2X SPECTRUM FOREST, AND LOOK FORWARD TO A GRAPHICALLY IMPRESSIVE MASTER SYSTEM PLATFORMER. 2024 IS ALREADY SHAPING UP TO BE GREAT. </INTRO>

<MAIN HEADER>

TRANSFORMING TOKI

<INTRO> DAVIDE BOTTINO WAS DISAPPOINTED WITH OCEAN'S C64 CONVERSION OF TOKI - AND NOW HE HAS SET OUT TO MAKE IT BETTER </INTRO>



<!-- ARTIST AND PROJECT LEAD DAVIDE BOTTINO. -->



<!-- [C64] A SPRITESHEET SHOWING MANY OF THE ENEMIES FOR TOKI REMASTERED. -->

<BODY> Davide Bottino has fond memories of TAD Corporation's Toki. "In the summer of 1990 my friends and I went crazy for *Toki* and played it at our local bar," he recalls. Although Davide saw the C64 cartridge advertised in *ZZAP! Italia*, he didn't play that conversion until many years later. "There are several flaws. The sprites aren't particularly faithful in design and in many cases, are quite ugly," he tells us. "I was particularly disappointed with the main character. The last level background is of a lower quality than the others. The soundtrack is nice, but it's just one piece for the whole game and is not played along with the SFX, which are quite poor anyway. Playability is decent, but problems in the control system and unforgiving collisions make the game too difficult and frustrating."

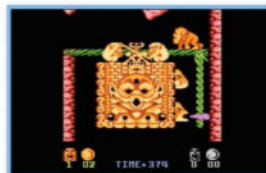
Having made PC homebrew, Davide got the urge to do pixel art again. "I use Paint.NET, a free tool with a minimal learning curve. I thought it would be nice to redraw an existing game lacking in the graphics department. I almost immediately thought of *Toki*: just changing the sprites without rewriting the code would result in a game more like the original, and only a few fixes would be needed to make it more playable."

Davide realised he'd need help to achieve this. "I began posting online looking for programmers willing to collaborate," he continues. "Mariano Cigliano contacted me, and a few days later Pasquale Sannino joined. A fantastic surprise came a few weeks later when Aldo Chiummo (composer with his brother Gaetano of the soundtrack to *A Pig Quest*) unexpectedly sent me his

excellent version of the first level music! He converted the entire soundtrack for the game shortly thereafter. Pasquale got the first results in reverse engineering the cartridge; Mariano wrote custom tools to replace the old sprites with the new ones, starting from spritesheets prepared by me. We were able to create the first updated build and validate the whole project!"

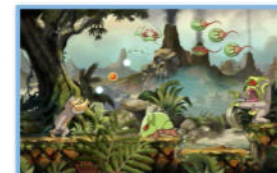
Euan Gamble also joined the team. "I have been quoted as a 'C64 reverse engineering expert'. I use Retro Debugger (C64 Debugger) a lot, and I built my own Python disassembler - my script speeds up the process." Euan found the task far from simple. "*Toki* is complex, constantly switching assets in and out during the game and dynamically making a set of sprites to

APE-LIKE ANTICS



TOKI
Atari 7800

< In 2015 a beta of the unreleased 7800 conversion was found but the ROM was never released: see bit.ly/toki7800 for details. >



TOKI
Switch, 2018

< This remaster had new cartoon graphics by French artist Philippe Dessoly (who had worked on the Amiga conversion) and an orchestral score. >



<---- (SNES) FAIRIES AND FRIENDS WILL HELP DOTTIE FLOWERS GAIN EXTRA POWERS THROUGHOUT THE GAME.---->

NEWSBYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<Amiga: Andy Vaisey released *Spheroid* (previewed in RG 254) at bit.ly/spheroid-amiga Locomalito's *L'Abbaye des Morts* received two different Amiga versions both requiring 1MB of memory – Jeefrog's version can be found at bit.ly/abbaye-amiga while *The Abbey(s) Of The Dead* by AB UltraNarwhal adds a second abbey to explore via bit.ly/abbey-s-amiga />

<Amstrad CPC: Play On Retro released its excellent *Booty Remake*. Check it out at bit.ly/booty-remake />

<Jaguar: Reboot Games announced the forthcoming *Rebounded*, inspired by the C64 game *Bouncer*. Bounce on over to bit.ly/rebounded />

<Lynx: Lynx Jam 2023 – itch.io/jam/lynxjam-2023 – challenged competitors to make a game with the same tile set, resulting in some great efforts including *Dungeddon* and *Silly Archery* (the latter played in TATE mode). />

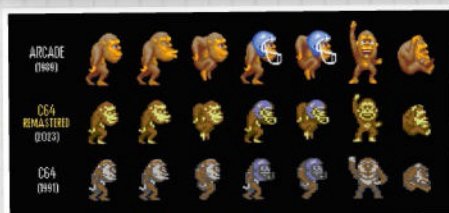
<Master System: Tzar created an excellent port of the classic *Battle City*, with v2 adding sound. You can find it at bit.ly/battlecity-sms />

<PICO-8: Paul Hammond's latest arcade adaptation is *Amidar* – bit.ly/amidar-pico8 – while *Crazy Taxi* fans will enjoy *Whiplash Taxi* from Tom Mulgrew – bit.ly/whiplash-taxi – with its Time Attack, Street Race and Free Explore modes. />

<PLUS/4: Csabo has produced *Into The Eagle's Nest Deluxe*, recolouring the graphics and fixing bugs. Explore it by investigating bit.ly/eaglesnest-plus4 />

<SNES: Try the demo of super-cute platformer *Dottie Flowers* from Goldlocke (above). If you fancy a physical cartridge (Super Famicom compatible) head over to bit.ly/dottiefowers />

<ZX81: Jonathan Cauldwell's *Fun Park* recreates *Theme Park*, requiring 16K memory, the Chroma colour board and Quicksilver Character Generator board. Start your queuing at bit.ly/funpark-zx81 />



<---- OUR HERO TOKI STRIKES SOME POSES, WITH THE REMASTERED (MIDDLE) GRAPHICS LOOKING CLOSER TO THE ARCADE (TOP).---->



<---- THE GIANT MAMMOTH ZARZAMOTH ATTACKS – ON C64 (LEFT), ARCADE (MIDDLE) AND REMASTER (RIGHT).---->



<---- PROGRAMMER EVAN GAMBLE STRIKES A POSE. ---->

045 show," he explains. "Davide has specific ideas about
046 how the sprites should look (almost arcade-exact) and
047 that requires repositioning, changing hitboxes, etc.
048 Finding the sprites, finding how they are loaded, and
049 then finding the sprite properties is quite challenging."
050 Davide is pleased with the end results and hopes
051 others will follow suit. "I invite anyone who has some
052 familiarity with retro systems programming and wishes
053 to deepen their knowledge while having fun in a
054 challenging project to join our passionate team: the retro
055 gaming community will be grateful to you for reviving
056 one of their favourite games!" </BODY>

<INTRO> MORE TAKES ON TAO CORPORATION'S TOKI </INTRO>



TOKIMAL
ZX Spectrum, 2021

<Pat Morita Team's *Tokimal* was not a direct conversion of the arcade game, but it earned joint first in ZX Dev 2021 (see RG 233 for more info). />



TOKI
Amstrad CPC, 2022

<Although Ocean planned a GX4000/Amstrad Plus port, Amstrad GGP eventually produced *Amstrad Toki* between 2019-2022 – earning 88% in RG 241. />



TOKI ARCADE
NES patch, 2022

<This ROM patch – bit.ly/toki-patch – altered graphics including the main sprite, added a title screen, and fixed a bug. />

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates



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retrogamer@futurenet.com

CHAMPION CODER OLOF NAESSÉN

<INTRO> AFTER CREATING HOMEBREW GAMES FOR WINDOWS, OLOF IS TURNING HIS ATTENTION TO NINTENDO HARDWARE </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: SWEDEN WEBSITE: DARKBITS.SE / DARKBITSORG.ITCH.IO/
FORMAT: NES, SNES PREVIOUS GAME: DEATH STRIKE, DAZED IN SPACE (WINDOWS)
WORKING ON: DATA MAN (NES) />

HOW ARE YOU ENJOYING DEVELOPING FOR THE NES?

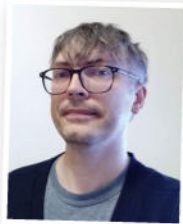
<It's a nice and relaxing hobby for me – a stark contrast to my daytime job in the AAA game industry. The NES and SNES enforce limitations which I think makes it easier and more fun to be creative. (My SNES project is a port/remake of an unfinished RPG I've done for PC, on hold until we have finished *Data Man*.) />

WHAT TOOLS DO YOU USE TO CREATE YOUR GAMES?

<Games are programmed in assembler with a text editor and CA65. For debugging, I use the emulator Mesen and a flash cartridge. I always regularly test on real hardware. For graphics, I mostly use Aseprite and NES Screen Tool. I write my own tools mainly in C/C++ but sometimes Python. />

WHAT INSPIRED DATA MAN?

<*Data Man* is made by me and two friends. We wanted to make



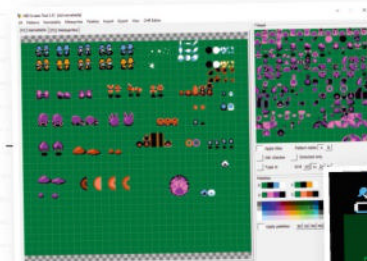
<!-- "I MANAGED TO MAKE A FEW SIMPLE TEXT ADVENTURES IN COMMODORE 64 BASIC," SAYS OLOF ON HOW HIS PROGRAMMING CAREER STARTED. -->

a NES game we could play together without competing but truly cooperating. We decided to target the smallest possible cartridge commonly used – 40KB of storage. How we came up with the idea that you defend the NES and its CPU itself from bugs I don't really remember. It fitted the co-op game we wanted really well given that health is shared between players.

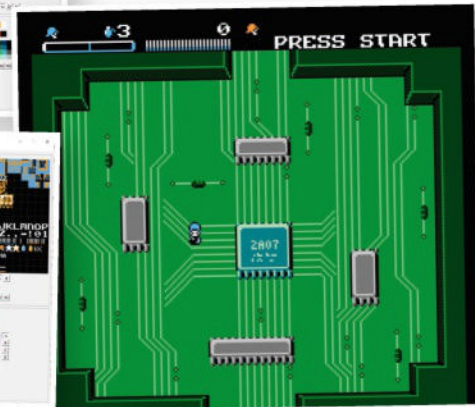
Xeno Crisis by Bitmap Bureau was a big inspiration, not only in terms of gameplay but also the fact that it is a fantastic homebrew for the Mega Drive. />

HOW DOES IT LOOK SO SLICK AND WHEN CAN WE EXPECT A RELEASE?

<We can have a lot of entities on the screen at once without any noticeable slowdown. There is no real secret, just optimised assembler code that handles updating their logic and drawing them onto the screen. The game is more or less done – what we have left is balancing and testing to make sure we have as few bugs as possible. At the time of writing, we have 247 bytes left, so plenty of space for fixes! We plan on a digital and physical release and the target is Q1 2024. />



<!-- THIS BACKGROUND IN NES SCREEN TOOL FEATURES THE CLASSIC MOTOROLA 6502 PROCESSOR. -->



<!-- [NES] A 'GLITCH' EFFECT HAPPENS WHEN THE CPU TAKES DAMAGE. -->

DATA BURST

BRILEY WITCH CHRONICLES 2



<INFO FORMAT: C64 CREDITS: WITCHSOFT (SARAH JANE AVORY – DESIGN, GRAPHICS, PROGRAMMING, MUSIC; PAOLO RATHJEN – GRAPHICS) PRICE: \$9.99 OR MORE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD)
WEB: BIT.LY/BRILEY2 />

<BODY> Based on Sarah's novels, this picks up the story of Briley Forester. She's now living in the village of Maepole and learning more about her powers as a witch – thanks to the Barrow Grimoire. Briley starts off delivering bread to the villagers, while short quests help introduce the menu controls (with hints delivered by Sarah herself in portrait form). The Remind option handily tells you about your current quest, helping when you resume playing after a save. Briley must also be mindful of Lord Grey, who is coming to one of the village's festivals, as well as the game's many wild creatures. Battles take place in a turn-based format as before, with Battle Macros to speed up input as you select physical attacks, cast Spells, use Skills, or deploy helpful items. The Easy difficulty lets you concentrate on the story, with Normal offering much tougher battles. The gorgeous character portraits during dialogue and bitmap cutscenes are just as good as the original game and it's all backed up by a dynamic soundtrack and decent sound effects. The clever dialogue makes the deep narrative fun, particularly Briley's sarcastic cat Smokey (who fights by her side). With up to 20 hours of gameplay as you explore beyond Maepole, including a side quest to find all the hidden foxes, this is a superb sequel and another fine RPG for the C64. </BODY>

SCORE:

90%



<!-- [C64] BRILEY CHOOSES A SPELL TO CAST IN BATTLE.



<!-- [C64] FELLOW WITCH ALYSSA HAS A KEY ROLE IN THE SECOND INSTALLMENT.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: retrogamer@futurenet.com

THE HOME BREWER'S KIT



<--- [PC ENGINE] KINGSLEY AND HIS TROOPS FACE THE RAIDERS AS THEY DEFEND THE CITY WALLS. --->



<--- [PC ENGINE] DIALOGUE ON THE OVERHEAD VIEW HELPS TELL THE STORY BEFORE A BATTLE IS FOUGHT. --->

STRIFE SISTERS

<INFO FORMAT: PC ENGINE CREDITS: MATTHEW KERSEY PRICE: £20 (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD), £48/£80 (PHYSICAL CD/LIMITED EDITION) WEB: STRIFESISTERS.COM />

<BODY> The fighter Rei and witch Violet must save the world in this entertaining tactical RPG. The first few levels explain how to move and fight, nicely setting you up for the later battles. Extra fighters can be hired to join your squads, but you must learn new Formations in order to add them. This can be done in *Strife Sisters'* Training and Challenge modes by generating enemy squads to fight against. In the main Battle mode, however, units will be lost permanently if they die (as in the *Fire Emblem* titles that influenced this game). Cute sprites and backgrounds sell the idea of a fantasy world, although the music can be a little repetitive. The lack of a save game facility is quite the drawback, but there is still a deep challenge here. </BODY>

SCORE:

75%



<--- [ZX SPECTRUM] WEE KNIGHT STARTS ON A NEW ADVENTURE. --->



<--- [ZX SPECTRUM] IT'S NOT LONG BEFORE WEE KNIGHT FINDS HIMSELF IN A HAZARD-FILLED SERIES OF CAVES. --->

FOREST ESCAPE – A KNIGHT'S QUEST

<INFO FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM (48K) CREDITS: IRATAHACK PRICE: \$3 OR MORE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD), £9.95 (PHYSICAL CASSETTE) WEB: BIT.LY/FORESTESCAPE-ZX / CRONOSOFT.FWSCART.COM />

<BODY> Wee Knight's first adventure was in the entertaining *Castle Escape* (bit.ly/castleescape-zx), and now he must escape the forest – by finding four keys to unlock four chests. Each screen is filled with numerous gold coins to collect, but there's also plenty of wildlife that drains energy, and magical flowers and mushrooms that can help or hinder Wee Knight. This is classic Spectrum platforming action, with proceeds going to the PKD Foundation for sufferers of a specific kidney disease. The difficulty is high, but everything is well presented, so give it a go and donate. </BODY>

SCORE:

82%

PROCESSING

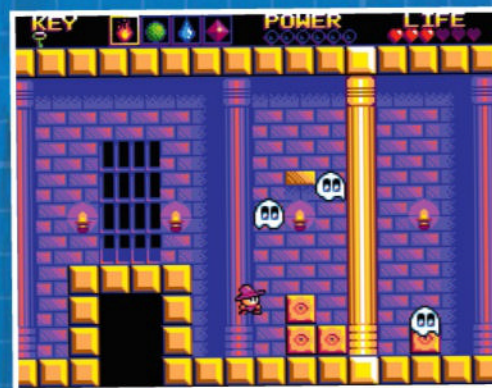
<INTRO> THE SORCERER'S CURSE IS THE WORKING TITLE FOR BADCOMPUTER0'S MASTER SYSTEM PLATFORM GAME THAT IS CURRENTLY IN DEVELOPMENT </INTRO>

<BODY> "You play as a tiny wizard trying to defeat an evil sorcerer and release a curse from your village," says Adam about his new project. "It's inspired mainly by *Wonder Boy III* and *Castle Of Illusion*, two games I loved growing up. I'm using devkitSMS by sverx: bit.ly/devkitsms. It's a development kit and collection of libraries for SMS and Game Gear and allows you to program in C language rather than assembly. I program in Visual Studio Code and debug using the SMS emulator Emulicious. I also use Aseprite for pixel art and Tiled for constructing level maps."

Adam will be looking to work with a chiptune musician later, for sounds and music, but how long will the game take to complete? "I'd guess at least six months. I can't devote all my time to it, but I work on it some evenings and weekends." You can follow @badcomputer0 on X/Twitter for more updates, and @helpcomputer0 for more of Adam's excellent pixel art. </BODY>



<!-- [MASTER SYSTEM] AFTER THIS FOREST LEVEL, ADAM HAS BEEN WORKING ON STAGE TRANSITIONS AND A CAVE TILE SET. --->



HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

EARLY 3D PLATFORMERS

The team look back at the popular genre's tentative steps in the third dimension



DARRAN JONES



NICK THORPE



TIM EMPEY

This month's cover star has had us yearning for the days of yore when the platformer was making its first tentative steps into 3D.

Nick, Darran and Tim look back at the stars and duds of this transformative era.

DARRAN

What's the first 3D platformer you can remember playing?

NICK

I think mine would have actually been *Crash Bandicoot* on a friend's PlayStation. Well, unless *Pandemonium* counts?

TIM

Well *Pandemonium* is a platformer that uses 3D visuals, so yes. I played it too, but *Tomb Raider* was the big one for me. Funny-ish story, Woolworths in Portadown didn't have it so I got

a friend to drive all the way to Belfast and I picked it up there, while my mate picked up a fine from the police for some traffic violation. Oops.

DARRAN

I played *Bug!* on my mate's Saturn, but around the same time I saw the Japanese version of *Super Mario 64* and that floored me. Would it be correct to say that *Super Mario 64* and *Tomb Raider* created the template for most of the early games?

NICK

I'd say that's fair. You look at

earlier games like *Jumping Flash!* and *Bug!*, and they're fun but they don't have much of a legacy by comparison.

TIM

I only know *Jumping Flash!* (maybe *Jumping Flash! 2*) from a PS2 demo disk, but I was impressed by how high up you could get in that.

DARRAN

The scale of *Jumping Flash!* always impressed me, although I'd argue *Tomb Raider* takes it even further due to the gargantuan size of the caverns



» [PlayStation] Despite releasing afterwards overseas, *Crash Bandicoot* made its PAL debut before *Super Mario 64* did.

NICK

It influenced quite a lot of games, really. I saw hub areas as an annoying distraction in *Sonic Adventure* and was really pleased that *Sonic Adventure 2* returned to linear progression, but I've come to appreciate them over the years.

DARRAN

I wondered how long it would take for Nick to mention Sonic!

TIM

There was even a hub in *Vexx*, though it's probably one of the worst 3D platformers ever. But they are handy if you want to dip in and out of a level if things are getting tricky. I'm pretty sure some *Spyro* games did that as well.

DARRAN

I've not really played the *Spyro* games, although I think I picked up the original as part of a bundle. Why do we think so many games like *Bubsy 3D* and *Earthworm Jim 3D* didn't find the same success that *Super Mario 64* and *Tomb Raider* managed?

“I absolutely loved *Sands Of Time* but was massively disappointed with the sequels”

DARRAN JONES



» [PlayStation] Many 2D heroes failed to make a convincing jump to 3D, such as with *Bubsy*.

» [PC] *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* was a fantastic reboot that led to several sequels.

NICK

It's easy to forget that the 2D *Earthworm Jim* games were the end product of years of refinement, through games like *Cool Spot* and *Aladdin*. By comparison, *Earthworm Jim 3D* was a first try at 3D and one that had a bit of a tortured development as I recall, which probably had a lot to do with why it wasn't nearly so good. *Bubsy 3D* though, I don't know why they didn't just scrap it to be honest – it was totally beyond salvageable.

DARRAN

That's a fair point about *Earthworm Jim*, Nick. Maybe there was too much expectation on some of those games, which is why newer stuff like *Crash Bandicoot* felt so fresh at the time. I loved those into-the-screen levels.

TIM

Crash Bandicoot was a bit of a revelation really. First time I ever ran away from a boulder while running into the screen. I died a lot though. So what was the next revelation in 3D platformers? It certainly wasn't *Ty The Tasmanian Tiger*, I can tell you that...

NICK

Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time had the cool environmental puzzles of *Tomb Raider*, but felt like a massive step up in terms of control and had the novel time reversing gimmick. The combat wasn't amazing, but you can see how it influenced games like *Uncharted* later on.

DARRAN

I absolutely loved *Sands Of Time* but was massively disappointed with the sequels. Too noisy and too much focus on combat. There were a lot of poor platformers during this era. I can remember *Whiplash* and *Voodoo Vince* on Xbox, but I'm sure you've got some classics from your time on *Cube*, Tim.



» [PlayStation 2] *Sonic Heroes* might not have been as good as *Sonic Adventure*, but we preferred it to *Shadow The Hedgehog*.

TIM

Yeah, there was a huge influx of shoddy platformers around that time, but we mostly gave them to Ryan King to review as he was new on the mag. Unfortunately for me I ended up reviewing drek like *Scaler* and *Malice* as freelance, mostly because *XBM*'s deputy editor liked how wound up I got when writing them. So, *Jak And Daxter* or *Ratchet & Clank*?

DARRAN

Definitely *Jak And Daxter*, I played it last year and really enjoyed it. I've currently got the *Ratchet* and *Sly* games all ready to go on PS3. Man, *Jak* was so good, but I really didn't like the direction of the later games.

NICK

I'd say probably *Jak*, but yeah – *Jak 2* was a pretty wild swing towards a darker and edgier tone, just like *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within*. You can see why UK: Resistance campaigned for blue skies in games.

DARRAN

Absolutely, and that leaves us with just enough space to give *Shadow The Hedgehog* the coverage it deserves. ★



» [PlayStation] Early 3D platformers like *Pandemonium* and *Bug!* weren't free-roaming affairs like *Super Mario 64*.



» [Nintendo 64] *Mario's* first 3D outing was a revelation, setting a standard that many other games copied.



» [Saturn] *Tomb Raider's* sense of scale really impressed in the early days of 3D.

PLATFORMING PERFECTION

The 3D platformers readers loved

ACO

Super Mario 64. What can I say? It blew my mind seeing it on my cousin's N64 as a kid.

Kao The Kangaroo

Hmm... *Kao The Kangaroo*.

Bathroom of the Future

If it counts, *Klonoa* was a big one for me – the atmosphere was unlike anything I'd seen in a game before, and the way the game blended 2D platforming with 3D designs and level construction still impresses me.

Lizard Girl Green

Ty The Tasmanian Tiger is still one of my all-time favourites! I have incredibly fond memories of it and I still REALLY enjoy coming back to it! It's nothing groundbreaking but I just love all the different boomerangs and the game is so pretty and I love the music!

Age of Bahamut

Spyro The Dragon – from the jaw-dropping demo with *MediEvil* right through its release, it was astounding for a PS1 at the time. Besides, dragons are cool.

Marko Latvanen

Alpha Waves on the Atari ST.

Stephen Smith

Tomb Raider. Got it with our Playstation; however dated it may be, there's still something evocative and atmospheric about it, even now. The platforming and design work so well together you'll try even the most impossible leap, because there's got to be a way to do it!

Martin S Dixon

Sly Raccoon 2: Band Of Thieves is a platformer I keep going back to even now. It really nails the lite-stealth it aims for, and crafts some fun open levels to get around that shrink down really well into tightly focussed missions.

Noxcron

Jak 2. I already loved 3D platformers by that point thanks to the original *Jak And Daxter*. I was interested in *GTA* but wasn't allowed to play it so *Jak 2* was that perfect middle ground between what I loved and what I wanted to play. Along with its crazy tonal shift it stuck with me big time.

Joshua Taylor

Banjo-Kazooie. Rare had a way with taking great concepts that Nintendo made and making them even more magical. The unique and fun characters, humour, music, movement, etc. It defines the best qualities of the genre.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH THE RETRO KEYHOLE



CRASH TWINSANITY PRIMA GUIDE

"My favourite game and this item, I don't really see out there a lot. I think it has a few renders that aren't really seen all the time, but I'm still doing research on it."

AMOUNT PAID: £20

DELUXE CRASH BANDICOOT WITH SCUBA GEAR

"This one I like mainly because it looks a lot like the game model. I just like game-accurate things a bunch and this one's really detailed."

AMOUNT PAID: £35

BANDICOOT BOUNTY

Our latest collector is crazy for Crash

BIO

NAME:
Charlie Weller

LOCATION:
London, UK

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
It depends, about £350?

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
PlayStation 2

FAVOURITE GAME:
Crash: Twinsanity

TWITTER:
@WumpaBro



The great thing about classic games is that new fans are getting into them all the time, and this month's collector is proof if it were needed – they're some years younger than their favourite character, Crash Bandicoot. So how did they first become a fan of the madcap marsupial? "When I was about five years old, I think my dad came home with a PlayStation 2 that he got from work from one of his colleagues. I think my first game was not *Twinsanity*, it was *Nitro Kart*," Charlie remembers. "I just absolutely loved how goofy Crash sounded, and I just really wanted more of the games. So one day, he did come home with a bundle of those, and one of those games happened to be *Twinsanity*. I could never really get too far on it, but I really loved the world, the environment, the music. I guess that's just how I discovered Crash."

Being relatively young, Charlie's collecting habit started quite recently. "It's been going on since 2017. I've always wanted to own at least something *Crash Bandicoot* related ever since I was a kid," we're told. "I used to just go on Google for hours and see all these figurines from Resaurus back in the mid-Nineties and I'd be like, 'My God, I need this.' I can't really find any good quality ones at the moment because most of them are missing their arms or legs, but I still really want to try and get one of those if I can, even if it's in a box."

Charlie owns plenty of *Crash Bandicoot* merchandise and "most of" the games, with the more recent games being favoured – *Crash Bandicoot 4* is second only to *Crash: Twinsanity*. Is it just a nostalgia pick? It's a big part but it's not wholly down to that, as Charlie tells us. "The game is unfinished and it is well known that it is, but somehow it still works, like it *really works* and I

don't get why, but it's just that weird unique charm about it that just really strikes out to me." The games that aren't in the collection may surprise you. "I think the only ones I'm missing at the moment would be the original PlayStation trilogy, and *Crash Bash*," says Charlie – something that is put down to the higher prices of those early games, particularly an original copy of the first game.

New additions to the collection are on hold at present as most of it is packed away for an impending house move, but is there anything else Charlie's looking to add to the collection? "I would say a couple of the Japanese *Crash* games," they reply. "I do want to try and get some of those in because Crash had a different design in Japan, and the covers are sort of not too different, but it's different enough that you can tell it's made for Japan." Hopefully that move goes smoothly and the import delights come sooner rather than later. ★

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

f RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag ✉ retrogamer@futurenet.com

CRASH CEREAL TOY

"This one was my first Crash Bandicoot item that I got in 2017. This was gifted to me by a friend who noticed I had an interest in the series."

AMOUNT PAID:
GIFT

CRASH PLUSH

"It was actually a recent item, I was just searching eBay one night and found a really cheap listing for him. This is the first actual Crash Bandicoot I really wanted as a kid."

AMOUNT PAID:
£15

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

CRASH TEAM RUMBLE STORE DISPLAY

"This retro-game shop not too far from where I am had this standee in the store from about July time. I went to the store manager and said to them, 'I really love the series, how much would you be willing to let this go for?' It's probably the most unique part of my collection."

PAID: £45

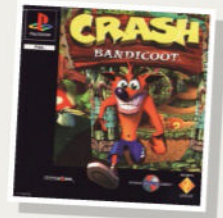


BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR CRASH BANDICOOT

The debut game for Naughty Dog's platform star varies quite widely in price, depending on edition and condition. We've seen a slightly tatty Platinum copy go for as little as **£7.50**, and a complete double jewel case version sell for a little over **£65** – a whopping price for such a popular game.



KUNG-FU MASTER

Activision's Atari 2600 conversion of Irem's arcade hit kicks high but won't hit your wallet too hard, with complete copies typically reaching the **£15** to **£20** range and loose carts selling for as little as **£6**.

BUGGY BOY

This arcade conversion varies by format – complete cassettes can be had for under **£5** on both the C64 and Spectrum, while Amstrad and Amiga versions go for under **£10**. Atari ST copies are pricier, around the **£20** mark.



SNAPPER

Jonathan Griffiths' popular Pac-alike isn't too pricey, with complete copies of the Electron version coming in around the **£7** mark. The BBC Micro version, also written by Jonathan, goes for ever so slightly less.

THE 7TH GUEST

A PC copy of this CD-ROM killer app is rather inviting, typically selling within the **£5** to **£10** range and sometimes going lower. The same pricing holds true on the CD-i, with even new, sealed copies only hitting **£30** to **£35**.



ICO

This PS2 favourite comes in two flavours. The original printing comes in a cardboard case with art cards, and fetches **£15** to **£40**. The reprint is in a plastic case with a PEGI rating, and costs less at **£8** to **£20**.

SKIES OF ARCADIA

This is one of the Dreamcast's premier RPGs, and Nick is going to have to splash out **£55** to **£95** to finally get it. The revised and expanded GameCube version, *Skies Of Arcadia Legends*, is even pricier at **£65** to **£130**.



HOW MUCH?!

HARMFUL PARK

Darren's Retro Revival might have shocked you, but he actually paid the going rate for this expensive PlayStation game. The last couple of copies sold on eBay went for **£393** and **£500** – and the former was only after a 10% discount. If you have access, it's available digitally via Japan's PlayStation Store.



Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR SHARED PASSION

PORTABLE POWER

Nick explains why he's a fan of Sony's debut handheld



Pardon my crankiness here, but now and again I get wound up by

some of the crap that people spout about the PSP. You've probably encountered some of it yourself, from the oft-repeated "it's only good if you hack it" to the utterly ridiculous claim that it was a "failure", which would be a spectacular achievement for a console that outsold the NES, SNES and Mega Drive. Maybe we're just so used to Sony dominating the market that it shocks us when anything else happens? In any case, the reason that I get wound up is that I have a rather strong affinity for Sony's first handheld.

If you've been reading **Retro Gamer** for a while, you might have a good idea of my history with the console. I was excited for it from the start and loved it in normal circumstances, but it became vital when I was acting as my sister's live-in carer at university. I couldn't keep my home consoles with me because it was only meant to be a temporary arrangement, and the PSP's push for home console-style experiences on the go really got me through. I recognise that I'm quite unusual in having a passion for the PSP though. When we ranked the greatest games machines of all time in issue 177, about one in six voters put the PSP in their top ten, but less than ten put it in their top three.

Why is it that people like the PSP, but don't seem to love it? I'd say it has an image problem. Many people see the system as little more than a handheld home for ports of games designed for more capable systems, and its most popular original games as cut-down counterparts to its PS2 and PS3 big brothers. There's some truth to both of those

arguments, but neither strike me as particularly bothersome. After all, it's not like having *Power Stone* and *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* on the go is a bad thing, and while the likes of *MotorStorm: Arctic Edge* and *God Of War: Chains Of Olympus* aren't quite as impressive as their less portable progenitors, they were certainly among the best games you could take on a train at the time.

But it's not like the PSP didn't have its share of interesting original games. The *Pursuit Force* games are a thrilling modern update on the motorised crime-fighting of *Chase HQ*, and *LocoRoco's* unique art style and control scheme help it to stand out among other platformers to this day. *Half-Minute Hero* manages to transform the RPG genre with *Wario Ware*-style speed, and if you're a fan of puzzle games like I am, games like *Archer Maclean's Mercury*, *Echochrome* and *Lumines* all offer different approaches to the genre and will keep you occupied for ages. It's also a great machine for fans of older games, no hacking necessary. There are plenty of worthwhile retro compilations from Capcom, Sega, Konami and even Electronic Arts, a company that rarely dips its toes into nostalgic waters.

What makes the PSP particularly worth investigating right now is that it remains one of the very cheapest platforms to collect for. Very few UK releases are above £50, and most can be had for £20 or less. Plenty even go for £5 or less – and we're talking about some of the system's best games here, including the likes of *Tekken*:

WISH LIST

WHAT'S NEXT FOR NICK'S PSP COLLECTION?

PSP SLIM

My original model system from 2006 is still going strong, but the TV output on this model would let me stream some PSP games.

PATAPON

This is one of the most memorable series to originate on Sony's handheld, and one that I somehow managed to miss back in the day.

CRUSH

You know I love puzzle games, and this is one that I've always wanted to try.

KILLZONE LIBERATION

I've never played the first-person shooters due to motion sickness, but I've heard very good things about this overhead shooter.

KUROHYOU: RYU GA GOTOKU SHINSHO

I'm a big fan of the *Yakuza* series, and an English translation patch released in 2023 means I can finally enjoy this spin-off.

Dark Resurrection, *Ridge Racer 2*, *SSX On Tour*, *Every Extend Extra* and the *WipeOut* games. That's before we even delve into the delights available on import, as

"I'm quite unusual in having a passion for the PSP"
NICK THORPE

the console was hugely popular in Japan in particular. If you do pick one up, just make sure to check the console's battery and replace it if necessary, as the original ones have been known to fail in recent years.

Sony certainly didn't make it easy to like the PSP at times, and the stop-start nature of first-party software support for the console was just one factor in that. It was always hard to swallow the company's role in putting Lik-Sang out of business over PSP imports, and some of its marketing was particularly ill-judged – the Dutch advert for the white PSP and the guerrilla marketing failure of All I Want For Xmas Is A PSP spring to mind. I can see why some people would really like to write it off, but I had much fun with the PSP regardless. And hey – playing second fiddle to the most popular handheld of all time is hardly a great shame. ★

[PSP] THERE'S SO MUCH MORE TO THE PSP THAN PS2 PORTS, AS GAMES LIKE *LOCOROCO GO* TO SHOW.

[PSP] I MISSED *GITAROO MAN* ON PS2, SO THE SECOND CHANCE TO TRY IT ON PSP WAS MOST WELCOME.

MY ORIGINAL PSP IS STILL IN GOOD WORKING ORDER, WITH THE SAME WALLPAPER IMAGE I CREATED IN THE MID-2000S.

SINCE TAKING THIS PHOTO, I'VE GRABBED *MOTORSTORM: ARCTIC EDGE* AND A PHYSICAL COPY OF *VALKYRIA CHRONICLES 3: EXTRA EDITION*.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PSP GAME?

Readers share their favourite UMD releases

Sean Season

Ridge Racer 2. It was like having the greatest hits of the entire series in your pocket at all times, what's not to love?

Grant Hudson

For me it's *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles* as it contained a hidden version of my favourite game in my favourite franchise. *Symphony Of The Night* is included in this package and it's a slightly upgraded version of the PlayStation original.

Bl4ze98

For me it's definitely *Daxter*. The graphics still blow me away for how good they are, the controls are nice and simple and the music is really good. I've finished the game around ten times and I'd honestly do it again.

Koyomi

Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories. I spent a tremendous number of hours maxing out everything that was possible. That was my first *GTA* instalment to reach 100% completion. And to my disappointment *GTA IV* that I played next didn't offer a fraction of the fun I had on PSP with *Liberty City Stories*.

Oli

Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker. Playing what felt like a full-fledged *MGS* game on the go blew my mind!

Alix Bergeret

LocoRoco, it looks and sounds so cute, the gameplay is original and works, and the level design encourages exploration. A proper gem!

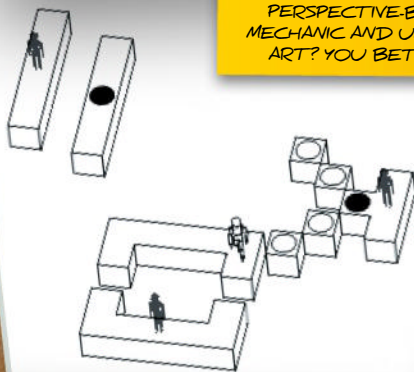
I LOVE THE PURSUIT FORCE GAMES, AND THIS PRESS KIT IS ONE OF THE LESS COMMON ITEMS TO BE FOUND IN MY PSP COLLECTION.



[PSP] I'VE LONG LOST TRACK OF HOW MUCH TIME I SPENT CHASING HIGH SCORES IN SPACE INVADERS EXTREME.

[PSP] I'M A COMMITTED WIPEOUT FAN, SO THE SERIES WAS A HUGE REASON I DECIDED TO PICK UP THE PSP.

[PSP] A PUZZLE GAME WITH AN INTERESTING PERSPECTIVE-BASED MECHANIC AND UNUSUAL ART? YOU BET I'M IN.



[PSP] TEKKEN: DARK RESURRECTION FELT LIKE IT JUST SHOULDN'T BE POSSIBLE ON A HANDHELD BACK IN 2006.



MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – [TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG](https://twitter.com/RETROGAMER_MAG)

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!



» Darran owned one of these on release. He's too scared to see what they retail for now.

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I'm not sure if you were going for a pun (Mailbag **RG** 255) when you said in the picture caption, "We'll run a GBA cover as soon as we've found a suitable angle for it..." Still, it does perfectly capture the whole GBA screen illumination issue (its lack of a backlight and having to hit that perfect position so you could actually see what was going on).

So perhaps there could be a lenticular cover which is all blacked out until you hold it at a certain angle, then the GBA emerges! (OK, maybe not so good for the newsstand, but as a subscription cover...) I was certainly glad when the GBA SP came along a couple of years later.

Regards

Steve Sudlow

We're glad you enjoyed the little joke, Steve. We also appreciated the upgrade to the **GBA SP**. In fact, Darran liked it so much that he imported an expensive *Boktai* version then accidentally sat on it and smashed its glorious screen on a drunken night out.

THREE QUESTIONS

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

First of all, thank you for a brilliant mag. I look forward to it being delivered and always enjoy a great read. I've meant to write in for a while, so I now have three questions for you.

I used to own a Mega Drive back in the day, and remember renting a game called *Bio-Hazard Battle*. I can't say I've seen it in the magazine, so do any of you remember it?

Again on the Mega Drive, I played *Lemmings*. I finished it except for one level. A friend at the time had a PC and wouldn't entertain the Mega Drive version. I maintain that the Mega Drive version was harder than on PC because you couldn't pause the action and assign a task to a lemming. It had to be done in

real-time. Do you know if I'm right? Finally, a PC magazine I subscribe to puts the previous year's issues on a disc that is then available to purchase. Is that something you could do?

Thanks for reading,
John Ritchie

Thanks for the kind words, John. Here's the answers to your questions. Yes, both Darran and Nick are aware of *Bio-Hazard Battle*. You're also right about *Lemmings*. In terms of buying previous issues on disc, we used to do this many years ago but stopped due to lack of interest.

STAR LETTER SEEKER

Hi **Retro Gamer**

I won Star Letter a few years ago so I hope to repeat it again with a rant about the current gaming consoles. Let me explain. I got the latest *COD* game for my Xbox One X and I had to wait half a day to play it due to my broadband not being fibre. It happened again last year with *COD Vanguard* but while that was 90GB of download, the latest was 250GB. What really gets me is I got the

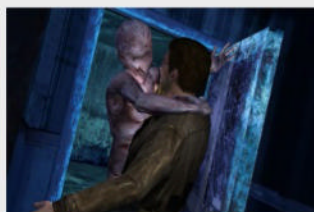
STAR LETTER WELCOME TO THE PARTY, PAL!

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I'm so excited that we're now entering 2024. Why, because you can now put my favourite game on the cover. I adore the *Silent Hill* games and particularly love *Shattered Memories*. It might be a remake of the original game, but it's done in an incredibly novel way that still feels impactful after all these years. It scared the bejesus out of me as a teenager and it's still able to make me jump today.

The original Wii version is still the best, but I've also got the PS2 and PSP versions and they're not bad either. The remake of *Silent Hill 2* is out this year, so putting *Shattered Memories* on the cover would be perfect timing.

Many thanks,
Jason Turner



» [Wii] Is it too early to be putting Wii games like *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories* on the cover? Jason doesn't think so.

Wow, it feels like only yesterday that we reviewed *Shattered Memories*, Jason. Interestingly, the feature Reinventing Silent Hill has already looked at your favourite game, so seek out a copy of issue 214 if you can. Although you've made us feel old, you deserve a book for the *Die Hard* meme you included with your email.



» [Mega Drive] John feels Mega Drive owners had a much harder time with *Lemmings* than PC fans.



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» [Xbox One X] Alan isn't a fan of lengthy installation times on modern consoles and loves the simplicity of the PS2.

disc version which the console takes about 1MB of and then says, "Sod that, I'll just annoy you and download it anyway."

I fired up the PS2 and was gaming in minutes on *Crazy Taxi* and enjoying it with the kids, so not all was lost on Christmas Day. It's a sorry state of affairs where the industry now thinks we all have

full fibre with unlimited downloads which I pay for on top of the game purchase. Is it me or am I just now officially a Victor Meldrew? Anyway, I love the mag and am currently buying cheap PS2 games which are truly the last gen of innovation, and no downloads required! Peace out! Kind regards,
Alan Jenkins

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

January Blues

Yes we know you're reading this in February, but that's the magic of print for you. January has been bitterly cold and the entire team has had the heating on. Darran even started playing *Ring Fit Adventure* in order to warm up, much to Melanie's amusement.



We agree that it's frustrating when your expensive disc is little more than a coaster, Alan. We also agree that the PS2 is a great system, although we're pretty sure Victor Meldrew never played videogames.



Your say

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What's your favourite 3D platformer on Sony's PlayStation?

» [PC] *Tomb Raider* was a hit on PC and also on Sony's PlayStation.

Martin

Proper platform game, *Jumping Flash!*. Absolutely brilliant and was truly the first game of its type to work. But *Tomb Raider* is superbly designed and actually hasn't been bettered in the genre.

Retro Game Den

Spyro 2 is not just my favourite 3D platforming game on the PlayStation, but it may be my favourite platformer of all time. The levels are all unique, the soundtrack is charming and fits the game perfectly, and I still think it looks great almost 25 years later.

Jason

Can I pick *Kula World*? It may have been a puzzler at heart but I definitely had to bounce that ball over gaps. And it was an

absolute delight. It almost made me want to go to a beach. [I'll allow it – Ed]

nick parmenter

Busby 3D, seriously. I was about nine and it was the greatest thing ever to me.

Jamie Robinson

Ape Escape. The various gadgets made great use of the DualShock controller's analogue sticks. Capturing the monkeys was fun.

Oli

Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos was the first game I had on PlayStation as a kid. It's a proper nostalgic game for me and still really fun to this day!

Chesterfield Claret

To avoid the obvious (*Crash*,

Spyro, *Croc*, *Gex*) I will say I loved a game called *Tail Concerto*. It was like a cross between *Ape Escape* and *Ghost In The Shell* and I thought the mech you walked around in was so cool and it was open world in places. Quite unique for the system...

Sir_top_&_hat

40 Winks. Each level had a fun overworld where you could grab collectables and enter the stages in any order.

Exiter Black

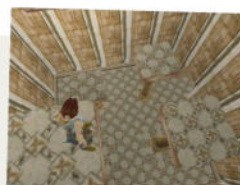
I always thought *Crash Bandicoot 2* had a special magic about it.

Flavio

Klonoa. The graphics are absolutely stunning even today!

Alan

Funny, you mentioned it already.



Tomb Raider, original and first. Music, gameplay, puzzles. Things that had never been seen before.

Jordan Of Patient Gamers

An answer I'm yet to see is *Toy Story 2: Buzz Lightyear To The Rescue*, easily one of my favourites from that time. Being the size of a toy and everyday furniture being the platforms was unique, it was pretty cool tracking back to earlier levels after unlocking new abilities too.

Taqim

Does *Tomba! 2* count as a 3D platformer? If yes, that's my choice. [It's allowed – Ed]

Banana Meteor

Spyro! Nothing beats a charming little dragon collecting gems to Stewart Copeland's beats.

retro GAMER

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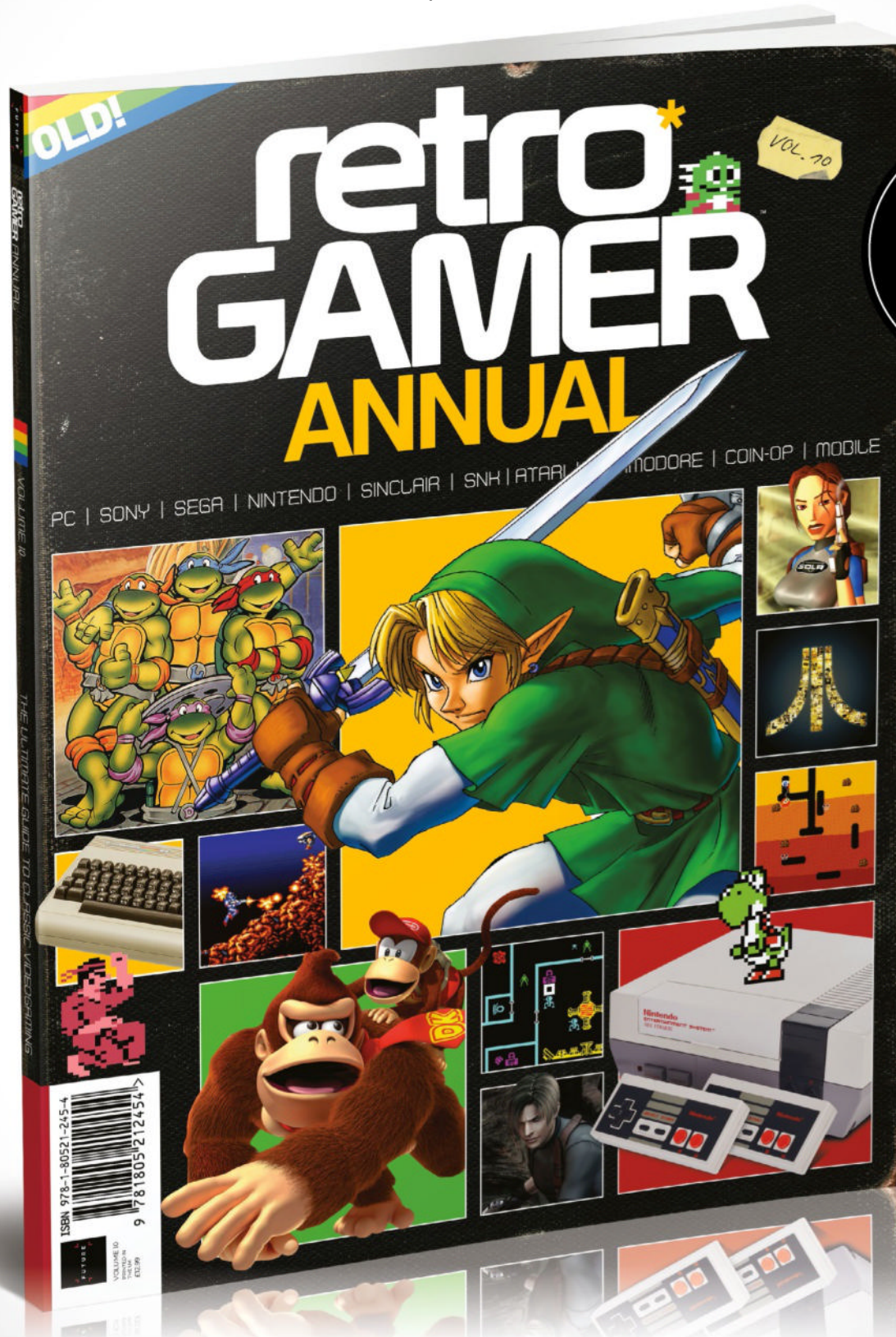
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ISSUE 257 SEES US CELEBRATING RETRO GAMER'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY.
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Deadly Creatures

I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS

» RETROREVIEWAL



» WII » 2009 » RAINBOW STUDIOS

One of the things I love about Nintendo's Wii is the sheer amount of odd software available for it, and *Deadly Creatures* is a great example.

A quick glance at the box art suggests that it's little more than shovelware, but that would be doing Rainbow Studios' game a great disservice.

Conceptually, *Deadly Creatures* is quite the interesting game. It lets you play as a tarantula and a scorpion and has you explore a dangerous world filled with predators that would love to make a snack of you. Both creatures have their own unique abilities, and, as you'd expect, the Wii's motion controls are heavily used throughout. They work exceptionally well though, with a good amount of accuracy.

It's fun leaping around as a tarantula or stinging enemies as a scorpion and there are some surprisingly good setpieces throughout that are not only inventive but do a great job of scaling the world and highlighting just how tiny these predators actually are.

As much as I enjoy *Deadly Creatures*, it does leave me with plenty of questions though. Why did the developers decide to make it a Wii exclusive? What made them think that *Shadow Of The Colossus* would be a good game to emulate for certain setpieces and why did they opt for such generic-looking box art?

By far the biggest question though, is how on earth they were able to convince Billy Bob Thorton and the late Dennis Hopper to appear in the game as greedy treasure hunters (you can see their characters here). It's strange hearing their distinctly recognisable voices crop up in such an unlikely place and I'd love to know how the collaboration came about. I think it's time to reach out to the developers again and find out how such an unlikely partnership came to be. ★



ENDGAME



CENTIPEDE

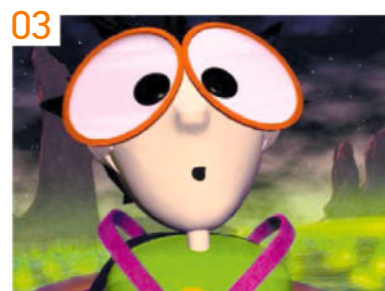
» When Hasbro bought the rights to the Atari brand, it decided that what the world really needed was 3D remakes of games like *Centipede*. Of course, that meant expanded stories, so here's a game in which some kid called Wally Gudmunzsun defends his tiny village from big bugs. Shall we find out how he does by skipping to the end?



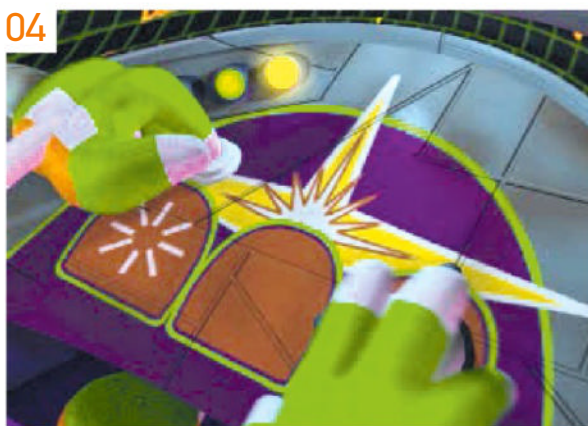
01 » Here's Wally, sidling up to the multi-legged menace. By the looks of the devastation, there's not really much of Wally's home left to defend, but by gosh he's going to try anyway. What else would a hero choose to do?



02 » Wally decides that there's no time to be timid, and opts for a bold approach that literally flies in the face of the marauding monster. As he enters its line of vision, his entire life flashes before his eyes.



03 » Fortunately, Wally is so young and his eyes so comically oversized that this process takes 0.4 seconds. He quickly regains his composure and starts executing his master plan to finish the destruction for good.



04 » Contrary to stereotypes linking glasses and intelligence, Wally isn't a master strategist and "shoot the monster in the face" appears to be the extent of his entire plan. Still, we really like the little nod to the arcade *Centipede* artwork on his control panel. Good job, cutscene artists.



05 » Success! Thanks to some severe dental disorder, the belligerent beast takes the shot right in the mouth. But wait – doesn't Wally know the rules of *Centipede*? Shooting the head just means the next segment becomes the new head. Wally, come back! You haven't finished the job, dummy!

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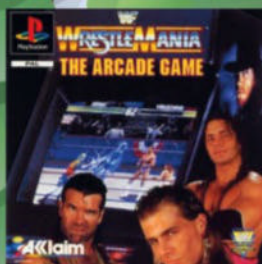
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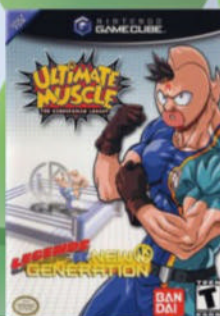
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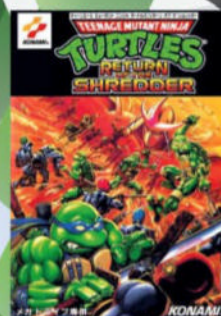
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